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MURIEL BERTRAM

AGNES · GIBERNE

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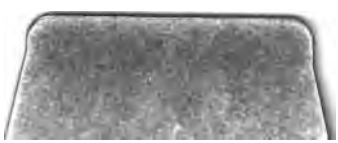

MURIEL BERTRAM.

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EXPLANATION.

MURIEL BERTRAM

A TALE.

BY

AGNES GIBERNE

AUTHOR OF "THE UPWARD WAY," "SUNS, MOONS AND STARS,"
"IN THE MIST OF ALL LIFE," ETC.

> "Oh, what a tangled web we weave
> When first we practise to deceive!"
> SCOTT.
>
> "Whilst thus I fight against my own desire,
> Shame keeps me back, and makes me worse by far;
> Thus coward-like I yield to my desire,
> And, subject to the tyranny of love,
> Am made a captive to myself and it."
> *Old Play.*
>
> One rock there is, and but one rock alone,
> On which secure the sheltered head may rest;
> One hope there is, and but one hope to crown
> Success on earth, and bring the weary peace.
> One refuge for the sinful and the lost,
> One name for all beneath the heaven of heavens,
> One Saviour, Jesus, Lord of all the earth,
> Who for our sakes became a man like us.
> Oh, precious Name! Oh, sweetest Name of all!
> Oh, Name of Names! Oh, Name all names above!
> Oh, Name of Jesus!
> *Chapter of Verses.*

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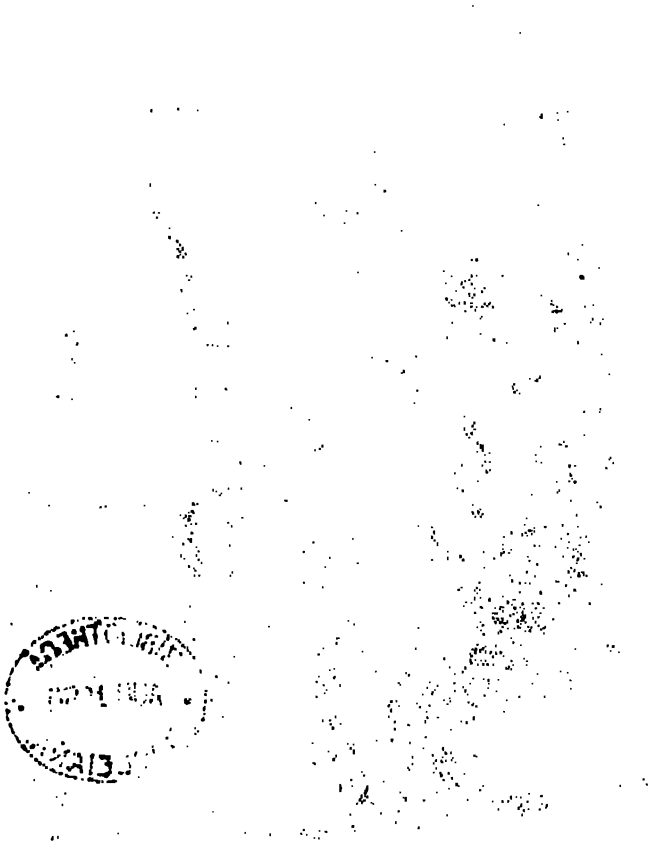

MURIEL BERTRAM

A TALE

BY

AGNES GIBERNE

AUTHOR OF "THE UPWARD GAZE," "SUN, MOON AND STARS,"
"THE MISTS OF THE VALLEY," ETC.

" Each change of many-coloured life."
S. JOHNSON.

" Behind the soft bright summer cloud
That makes such haste to melt and die,
Our wistful glance is oft allowed
A glimpse of the unchanging sky.
* * * * * *
One rock amid the weltering floods,
One torch in a tempestuous night,
One changeless pine in fading woods,
Such is the thought of Love and Might.
* * * * * *
Heaven's light is poured on high and low,
To high and low Heaven's Angel spake :
' Resign thee to thy weal or woe,
I ne'er will leave thee nor forsake !' "
CHRISTIAN YEAR.

SEELEY, JACKSON, & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET
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PART FIRST.

MURIEL BERTRAM.

CHAPTER I.

TWILIGHT.

MURIEL BERTRAM had come to a stand-still on her way home. She was rather given to doing so at this particular spot. The Claverton Road, winding round the hill half-way up its side, was lonely, and twilight had set in; but Muriel could not resist the temptation to linger. 'Just for a minute,' she said to herself. Of course the minute lengthened.

Something in the influences of that February afternoon held her spell-bound. Earth, air, and sky were alike in their stillness. Across the road at her back was a wood, cut across by divers paths, and clothing the hill to its summit. The low parapet in her front went deep into a sharply-descending field, and a wide stretch of country lay beyond.

It was a grey sort of day, but the grey, Quaker-like in softness, had a beauty of its own. Blue mists gathered in hollows, or circled clumps of trees, and a silver brook wound through the broad pasture-lands. Outlines of hills stood in purple clearness against a yellow-white horizon, which caught a pinkish hue towards the west. Slight glimmers of green near at hand gave promise of spring.

Muriel, with her head thrown backward, and her hand on the ivy-clad wall, took in the picture dreamily. There was something un-English and out of the common about her;

and about the curve of her mouth, and the fall of her eyelids, was a touch of repression and sadness.

Knowing she ought to hasten on, she yet delayed. The extreme quiet of all around infected her with a curious disinclination to move. Few people passed along this upper road at any time, and in winter it was especially lonely. Muriel had met none, and did not expect to meet any. She was in a mood for solitude, and had become so much wrapped up in her own thoughts as to be quite unaware of a break in her solitude.

For she was alone no longer. In the road, at a short distance, stood a gentleman, holding somewhat aloof; and a small maiden of eight years—a brown-eyed child of delicate make, with hair in a flaxen cloud falling below her waist—had crept stealthily to her side.

'Cousin Muriel.'

The touch on her seal-skin jacket made Muriel start.

'I thought it was you,' said the child.

'Why, Connie!'

Muriel caught the little figure in her arms, and held it fast. A passion of pain and pleasure went into the clasp, mingled with a guilty feeling; for this was against orders.

'O cousin Muriel, you never come to see us now.'

'No, Connie, I can't,' said Muriel, standing upright again, with the two small hands between her own. 'You must not ask me why.'

'I know why—partly,' nodded Constance. 'And I think somebody is very naughty; I do, cousin Muriel.'

'Little girls are no judges,' said Muriel.

'Ah, but I'm perfectly sure mamma thinks the same.'

'Connie, how do you come to be here? You cannot have walked.'

'Oh no, Mr. Fortescue drove us in, and we're going to meet him at the mile-stone. Papa could have walked it, but I couldn't.'

Muriel became suddenly conscious of the figure waiting in

the back-ground. 'John!' she cried eagerly, and the two came together.

'I was not sure if I might venture,' said John Rivers.

He was vicar in the neighbouring town, four miles distant, and in addition to being Muriel's first-cousin he had been brought up as her brother. The half-light showed him to be an Englishman of the refined type, without her foreign colouring, having a certain compact energy in each step and motion, and yet a touch of his little daughter's delicate look.

'O John!'

'This will not bring you into trouble, Muriel?'

'Let it! I don't care. I must have a few words.'

'Well—even enemies may shake hands,' said John quaintly.

'Strangers may not, though.'

'Is that to be our *rôle*?'

'If he had his will. John, I am all in a maze,' said Muriel impetuously. 'Why must I obey, and put you and myself to all this pain? Surely there are cases where one need not do all one is told. Surely the calls of brother and sister—of friends——'

'I never yet knew a tangle unravelled by disobedience,' said John.

'He isn't my father.'

'He has acted a father's part, and has a father's authority.'

'And could nothing make it right for me to go against him?'

'If I were dying, you might come to me at all hazards, I think.'

'John, don't talk of such a thing!' and tears filled her eyes. 'How are Rosie and the boys?'

'The boys are blooming. Rosamond is pretty well as to health, and as bright as usual.'

'I never knew Rosie anything else. John, *this* is disobedience,' said Muriel suddenly.

'What is?'

'Standing here, talking to you.'

'You think he would not like us to exchange even a few words?'

Muriel was silent. She could not make up her mind to say how strong the embargo as to intercourse had been.

'One thing is clear,' John remarked, 'and that is that you have no business to walk along this road in the dusk. Go home as fast as you like, but I shall not think it right to leave you till the turnpike is in sight. You may throw all blame upon me.'

The last thing she was likely to do, seeing that the wish of her heart was to bridge over the chasm between her cousin and her grandfather. They set off together, however, Connie clinging to Muriel on her other side.

'How are you all at home?' asked John.

'Just as usual. Mamma seems very well, and I think Lilias is stronger than last year. Grandpapa keeps wonderfully hale.'

'Does he ever speak of me?'

'Never, unless I bring up your name; but he has almost cured me of that. I can't bear to hear him say such hard things. O John, when I look back to the days when you could say and do nothing wrong, I can hardly believe in the change.'

'There is a standing cause,' said John briefly.

'I always feel guilty.'

'You! Your affair was a mere side-incident. Never trouble yourself about that, my dear Muriel. Could you have taken any other line?'

'No, indeed. But if you had not spoken for me so strongly, he would not have thrown all blame upon you.'

John shook his head. 'The true grievance lies deeper,' he said. 'You know that as well as I. Your little matter brought things to a point, but the climax must have come. I had had the greatest difficulty in not giving a loop-hole for offence before.'

'Ah, I know how careful and patient you were.'

'Not always. But the things he most minds are things which I cannot alter to please him.'

'I think life is very difficult altogether,' sighed Muriel. 'Do you remember, John, telling me of the want of harmony in my life?'

'No. Rather bold of me, was it not? What did I mean?'

'Why, you ought to know that best,' said Muriel. 'It was last year. We were amusing ourselves with the idea that everybody has a tune to play in life. Rosie declared some would do nothing but polkas and waltzes, and some could not get beyond a jig, and others were so classical and high above their neighbours that nobody could understand them, or say where the melody of their tune lay. And I said I thought the greater number were painfully *out* of tune, which explains why so many people jar upon one's nerves. And you said that the more men played in accord with heavenly harmony, the less there would be of jarring and discord.'

'I remember. Yes, we made something of the notion—to our own satisfaction at least.'

'It was afterwards that you spoke to me about myself—only a few words, but I have been thinking about them lately. And I have quite come to the conclusion that my tune in life is a mere wretched scraping upon a hurdy-gurdy.'

John smiled. 'Self-abuse isn't always humility, Muriel,' he said.

And then she knew, with shame, how she had counted on a contradiction from him. Whereas he only added:

'Too much of that in all of us, I am afraid.'

Muriel felt almost inclined to defend herself, but wisely refrained from a step which would have placed her in an odd position.

'However, I would take to a harp if I were you,' said John, somewhat quaintly again.

'No good, if all one's playing is to be out of tune.'

'Have you found your key-note yet?'

Muriel hesitated. 'I really don't know,' she said.

'You can't have your tune till you find your key-note.'

'And if I have no key-note?'

'Then you don't get beyond aimless strumming—child's play, in fact—small chance of melody or harmony there.'

'Practical and poetical as ever, John.'

'Work-a-day middle life knocks the poetry out of a man.'

'Middle-life—at thirty-one?'

'Off from the point, Muriel. I was going to say that I believe you have a key-note—generally.'

'What is it?'

'Ah! there's the question. I can't call your life aimless. I think your key-note may not be wisely chosen, and your playing may be sometimes out of tune.'

'The last is certain enough. John, what key-note should I have? The turnpike is very near.'

'Don't pitch upon a minor key. It depresses other people.'

'Do you think I'm inclined to do so?'

'Rather. You change your key too often. Pitch upon a major key-note, play at a good brisk time, and keep steadily to them both.'

'But, John, one must be melancholy sometimes.'

'How are you going to reconcile that with the "Alway rejoicing?"'

'But, John, haven't I cause?'

'"Rejoice evermore," Muriel.'

'I can't. I have troubles, and you know it.'

'Well, then, be "sorrowful, but alway rejoicing." My dear Muriel, you can't get out of it. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." St. Paul never played his life-tune in the minor key.'

'But when the depressed mood comes on, everything looks dark, and I can see light nowhere. O John!'

The exclamation was one of alarm this time; for a tall

figure strode past, stopped, looked round, and went swiftly on—a figure so tall, slim, straight and vigorous, that nobody would have guessed it to be that of an old gentleman in his seventy-sixth year. But to Muriel these were marks not to be mistaken, even without the abundant frizzly white hair which curled down over his collar, and made a frame-work round his face. Features were scarcely to be distinguished in the dusk.

The figure stopped again some paces ahead, and a voice said sternly—

'Muriel!'

'Yes, grandpapa.'

'Come here.'

John's hand grasped hers.

'Good-bye,' he said distinctly. 'All blame to me, you know.' Lower he added, 'You are not often out of our thoughts. Good-bye.'

His lifted hat was ignored by the old gentleman. John took little Connie's hand, and went quietly the other way.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOME ATMOSPHERE.

'WHAT do you mean by this?' demanded Mr. Rivers.

'I met John and Constance, grandpapa, two turns back in the road; at least they overtook me.'

'What then? I thought my orders were explicit.'

'I could not pass them by,' said Muriel with difficulty.

'I beg your pardon! When I give a command, there is no such thing as "could not." Once and for all, understand me. There shall be *no* intercourse between that fellow and my household.'

'That fellow!'—of one who, for more than a quarter of a century, had been the very pride of his heart! A throb of indignant pain brought tears to Muriel's eyes.

'I hardly ever meet them,' she said. 'John very seldom comes to Claverton now, and we have not exchanged a word for months. But when we do meet I can't treat them as strangers. I can't do it.'

'You—can't!' repeated Mr. Rivers with haughty deliberation. 'That is not the way to answer me.'

Muriel was silent, and her heart beat fast.

'I expect unquestioning obedience, and I will have it too. You ought to know that by this time. I am not to be trifled with, Muriel. By-and-bye, when you have had leisure to recollect yourself, we will have a few more words together. Now you may go home.'

He turned down a side-path, passing a turn-stile, and left her to pursue her way alone. It was somewhat lighter here

than among the trees, and houses stood at intervals in gardens. Muriel walked on, feeling a good deal tempest-tossed. She was angry for John, and distressed for herself, and uncertain as to the manner of reply she would give to Mr. Rivers. Things looked cloudy. Yet happening to meet two lady acquaintances, she bent cordially and smiled her brightest, and then stopped to chat with one of her little Sunday-scholars. But these were incidental breaks only. The shadow settled down upon her more heavily thereafter.

Claverton Manor, standing near the high-road, received ample shade from its shield of evergreens. The house was about a century old, and built upon a singular plan. The hall occupied the middle, rising through both stories to the roof, with a fretted ceiling like that of an old church. A passage ran round three sides of it, with doors leading outward into the several rooms, and a second passage overhead held the same position with regard to the second story.

Some narrow windows, Gothic and unglazed, opened from this upstairs passage upon the hall, and at one of these Muriel took her stand for a few seconds.

It was almost dark below. Opposite to her was a handsome circular window of stained glass, set in carved stone, red and blue tints being dimly visible. On one side beneath stood an organ, and a slender figure in white sat upon the bench, bringing out some sweet but rather uncertain sounds. The candle beside her lit up a face in complete contrast to Muriel's.

'Lilias will never make anything of music,' muttered Muriel, with a gesture of impatience at the sound of a false chord.

She went quickly to her own room, threw off her walking-things, and dressed for dinner. There was a moment's hesitation as to what dress she should put on, solved by a hasty, 'What does it matter? Nobody cares.' And she took the first which came to hand.

Reaching the hall once more, she found Lilias gone. A

glance showed her the little boy at the bellows still, and from that look she returned to take the empty seat. The contrast between the appearance of the two sisters was not greater than the contrast between their styles of playing. Muriel's fingers had no manner of uncertainty about them. The full chords poured out rich waves of sound. She did not see that Lilias had only gone to fetch another piece of music, and now stood waiting behind her.

Somebody else entered the hall—a lady, in rich evening dress, tall, fair and dignified, almost young-looking enough to have been Muriel's sister instead of mother, and indeed not twenty years her senior. Mrs. Bertram had married an Indian officer in very early girlhood, and had lost her husband directly after the birth of her youngest child. There was nothing of the widow about her now. She had the air of an acknowledged beauty, and neither of her daughters could at all rival her in looks.

And Mrs. Bertram was a woman of power. Not of intellectual power, though she was not wanting in common ability; but of that singular and arbitrary power which consists in winning love. She could gain the affection of any human being that she chose. Many loved her, without the exertion of intended attraction on her part, but none could resist when she did choose. Wherein the gift of winning power lay in her, and lies in others, it is hard to define. For some beautiful women have it, and some have it not, and some plain women possess it largely; and it is by no means certain to co-exist with intellect, though the two are found together. Sympathetic natures can boast it more often; but some intensely sympathetic people, who would give all they have for love, may never win it; while others, kind, but non-sympathetic, have affection rained upon them.

Mrs. Bertram could in no-wise be described as sympathetic, being far too self-absorbed for large out-goings of her heart to brother and sister human beings. But she knew her own power, and she took a pride in using it. She had

it in her to give pleasure or pain with the merest touch, and could call out fear as well as love. Yet with all this Mrs. Bertram's was an essentially common-place nature, shallow and contracted. Her centre was herself; her mistress was the world; her aim was to live and do and think precisely as everybody else lived, did, and thought. Her objects were common-place; her pride of birth and position were common-place; her self-satisfaction was common-place; her words and actions were common-place: yet all were invested with a halo of skin-deep beauty and grace. The common-place element was not often found out by strangers.

'Why is not Lilias playing?' asked Mrs. Bertram.

Muriel stopped slowly, letting the sound die away beneath her fingers. 'Lilias has gone,' she said.

'Lilias is here. This is her practising-time, Muriel.'

Muriel rose and moved away. 'Lilias should have spoken,' she said.

Lilias did not take the empty seat. 'I never play when Muriel is here, and, besides, one does not care to go on after an interruption,' she said.

'This is not to happen again,' observed Mrs. Bertram, as Lilias left the hall, with just a touch of the spoilt child in her manner.

'Lilias will never do much with music,' said Muriel rashly.

'That may be your opinion, but others do not think with you. Herr Richter says her advance is quite remarkable.'

Muriel made no answer. She held her head erect, and kept silence, with a proudly-submissive bearing which certainly did not spring from humility. Indeed, there was a self-contained coldness in this home manner of hers, widely different from her sisterly warmth to John, her tenderness to Connie, and her geniality to passing acquaintances—different, and less attractive.

'What made you put on a black dress to-night, Muriel?'

'It came first. I did not think it mattered.'

'It matters whether you please me, I suppose,' said Mrs.

Bertram, with a graceful air of displeasure. 'That shade of blue with your complexion is excruciating.'

Muriel looked down at herself. 'I can change the ribbons,' she said.

'Pray do. Mr. and Mrs. Haye will be here to dinner. You need not have dressed like a grandmother to receive them.'

'I did not know they were coming. But you don't like me in white, mamma.'

'Your choice does not lie between white and black only. Besides, I have no objection to black if it is well made and properly relieved. This style does not suit you.'

Muriel wondered whether she ever should find a style that suited her—in her mother's opinion. Other people held different views on the subject.

'I have seen John to-day,' she said suddenly.

'Where?'

'On the Claverton Road. He and Constance were there. We walked together a little way, till grandpapa overtook us.'

'You don't mean to say that he saw you with them!'

'He called me away. Mamma, if he had not seen me I must have told him, so it comes to the same thing.'

'Nonsense! What should you tell him for? I wish you had had more sense. Your grandfather never ought to have seen you together. We shall not hear the end of this for weeks.'

'I could not help it. Grandpapa came up from behind. Connie looks very delicate, I think. It seems so wrong that we should be cut off from them in this way.'

'No help for that,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'It is vexatious, of course, for people do remark upon family divisions. But John should have been more careful. Nothing can be done now. Once offended is always offended, with your grandfather. I never yet knew him change when he had such a feeling about anybody. Your aunt Constance, for example —*you know how long* that has gone on, and so will this.

After all, you have yourself partly to thank; and if you let him see that you disobey him now, you will just make matters worse.'

Muriel held her peace. Mrs. Bertram's manner to her was not irritated, but it was cold—a manner commonly seen when she spoke to Muriel. There was a marked difference in her bearing to her youngest daughter. An outflow of motherly tenderness went in that direction, but Muriel stood very much alone in the household.

CHAPTER III.

HEAT.

THE evening had come to an end, and the guests were gone. Mrs. Bertram sat turning her diamond bracelet round her white wrist, now and then glancing rather anxiously towards Lilias, who was leaning back with a fatigued air upon one of the couches. Lilias was easily overdone, and the tired expression did not suit her face, which wanted warmth at the best of times. Muriel stood in a spiritless attitude looking through an album; and a square-browed sleepy-eyed lad of seventeen or eighteen, having planted his chin upon his two hands, seemed lost to the outer world. Nobody knew much of Arthur Bertram's inner life. He was a clever boy, some said, but a very silent one.

Mr. Rivers, returning from the hall, whither with old-fashioned courtesy he had accompanied his guests, broke in upon the *tableau vivant*. He took his stand under the glass chandelier, and Muriel knew by the working of his long bleached whiskers that his state of mind was the reverse of serene.

'That fellow has been in Claverton to-day, Mary.' The words were jerked out with a sort of indignant bark. Muriel always recalled at such moments the nursery story, handed down from her infantine days, wherein the tiny Muriel was reported to have complained, 'I not like g'anpa's "puff! puff!" when he am ang'y.' But nobody had ever ventured to tell that tale to Mr. Rivers himself.

'He does not often come,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'He had better not. What brought him to-day?'

This was directed to Muriel.

'John, do you mean, grandpapa?'

'There is no need to waste breath over the fellow's name. Of course.'

'I do not know what brought him.'

'Speak the truth, if you please.'

Muriel flushed. 'I never thought of asking,' she said, answering composedly, though a certain trembling assailed her. 'We were talking of other things.'

'You were!—were you?'

'Lilias looks quite poorly,' interposed Mrs. Bertram adroitly. 'Come, darling—you are so pale and tired out—I must have you away to bed directly. And, Arthur, it is past your time. Muriel, you had better not stay up late.'

Mrs. Bertram saw Arthur out of the room, and followed with Lilias. Muriel had rather a forsaken feeling. She would have liked at least the support of her mother's presence. Her own attempt to say good-night was checked, as she expected.

'Stop, if you please. We must understand each other first. I allow no insubordination in my household.'

'I don't wish to disobey you, grandpapa,' said Muriel.

'You have done so. I forbade you absolutely to hold intercourse by word or by letter.'

'I have not seen him till to-day, or written to him at all. I could not pass him by,' she said again.

'You have nothing more to do with him. John Rivers is grandson to me no longer.'

'O grandpapa! And you used to love John so dearly.'

The words broke from her without previous intent, and she was half frightened when they were said.

The muscles round his mouth twitched sharply. Was there still some tenderness left in him towards this only child of his beloved and lost eldest son—this once idolized darling of his old age? For six or seven and twenty years

of his life John Rivers had borne no blemish in his grandfather's eyes. Men had said that, quarrel with whom Mr Rivers might, here at least was a tie which death alone could sever. But the closer the union, the more complete the rupture when it came. A lump of dough may be lightly divided, and lightly pressed into one again. A mass of iron can be parted in two only by mighty force, but once so parted, no mere exercise of strength will make the two halves one again. Nothing short of the furnace heat can bring about that end.

'John Rivers is nothing to me now,' sternly replied the old man. 'If you meet him, you are to pass him by as a stranger. You understand me—as a stranger. What people think and say is a matter of utter indifference to me. I care for one thing, and that is that I *will—be—obeyed.*'

The words came with slow emphasis. But Mr. Rivers did not wait for an answer as Muriel expected—still less did he insist on any promise from her. He walked hastily out of the room, and she could not see the cold damp which sprang to his forehead—could not know of the gnawing pain below—could not realize how her exclamation had struck home. Verily John Rivers had been the treasure of the old man's heart, and love cannot easily die.

As well that she could not. She would only have hoped, to be disappointed. Wrath and pride were stronger than the pain, and overmastered the love. If they could not kill it, they thrust it out of sight, and reigned rampant themselves. Mr. Rivers was a man of utterly undisciplined character. He had been spoilt in infancy, ill-managed in youth, unaccustomed through life to endure any manner of opposition in his own household. In his wife he had found a meek unreasoning slave; and from his daughter, Mrs. Bertram, he received unqualified submission. Other members of his family were less easily managed. But the headstrong temper and haughty self-will, which had ever been the prominent

points in his nature, were a trouble to all about him, and strengthened rather than decreased with age.

'Mary,' he said abruptly at breakfast next morning, 'I disapprove of the habit that these girls have, of walking alone in country lanes, and being out after dusk.'

'It is not right,' said Mrs. Bertram, whose settled principle of action was never to disagree with her father. 'Lilias would not think of such a thing, but Muriel likes to please herself.'

'I forbid it for the future.'

Muriel was a good deal disturbed. She inherited her grandfather's strength of will, and could not easily see her plans overthrown.

'Indeed, grandpapa, I come home generally as quickly as I can,' she said hastily. 'But at this time of the year it is not possible always to be back in full daylight.'

'You must give up whatever interferes with such a rule.'

'I could take the lower road, if you like; that is not so lonely.'

'You will take neither by yourself, except in daylight.'

'There is Mrs. Fielding's working-party every week.'

'Then you may tell Mrs. Fielding that I do not allow you to go till the days are longer. Anything else?'

'The Wednesday prayer-meeting in the school-room.'

Mrs. Bertram's look said, 'You have done it now!' The white framework round Mr. Rivers' face had a writhing movement.

'School-room prayer-meeting! So Claverton is to be favoured with that sort of thing! Humph! Were you aware of this, Mary?'

'Muriel generally keeps her out-of-door employments to herself,' said Mrs. Bertram, with affected indifference. 'We have not much in common.'

Muriel scarcely knew how to bear that. The small keen blade went deep, and she could have sobbed there and then

with almost agony. For how true it was. Mother and daughter, sister and sister, had almost nothing in common. Whose fault was it?

'Look here,' said Mr. Rivers, flushing up into a towering passion, and bringing down his fist upon the table with a blow which made his woman-kind start and whiten—'Look here, Muriel! Once and for all, this is to be given up. If you want school-room prayer-meetings, you may go and get them elsewhere. I'll have nothing to do with these new-fangled notions. Just the sort of namby-pamby way *he* began with his crazed Methodism. I'll not have it in you! so there's an end of the matter. If that is to be Mr. Fielding's style, I shall have a word to say to him. Curate, is it?—then the sooner the curate minds what he's about the better. You may be as religious as you like, in the proper way. A little more religious obedience would do you no harm. But I *won't* have you running after school-room prayer-meetings, and the methodistical rubbish of that smooth-faced young curate. So there!'

The closing 'puff' and convulsive writhe of the old man's moustaches were decisive. He pushed back his chair roughly, and disappeared into the garden.

Arthur cast a half-sorrowful glance at his sister's face, while Mrs. Bertram only remarked:

'You brought it on yourself.'

'I could not have said anything else,' Muriel answered stiffly.

'I beg your pardon. You were not in the least obliged to particularise.'

'I supposed grandpapa knew about the prayer-meeting.'

'No one was likely to mention it to him; and it has only been begun a few weeks. I always objected to your going. You have done Mr. Fielding no good. And you will get yourself into serious difficulties, if you take up this wilful mood. There is not much goodness in it to my mind. But people who go to prayer-meetings don't always think it need-

ful to keep their tempers at home. Lily dear, I want you in the drawing-room.'

Mrs. Bertram's words contained a home-thrust; and the softened tone of her last sentence, compared with what went before, gave one of those contrasts which always set Muriel's heart throbbing with a bitter jealous pain. It was the old pain which she had had to bear from earliest childhood, which never lessened, and to which she never grew used. Her love and admiration for her beautiful mother—despite that mother's moral bluntness—grew with her growth, and strengthened with her increasing strength; but they met with small return.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY.

MONTGOMERY MAXWELL picked his way in careful wise through the mud of the Upper Claverton Road. He chose that route on the same account that Muriel Bertram had chosen it the day before—by reason of its loneliness. But whereas with Muriel the wish for solitude was a mere passing mood, with Montgomery Maxwell it was a part of the man's being. He detested society with all his heart. He feared the face of no wild beast as he feared the face of fellow-man. He counted a Robinson Crusoe life the happiest under the sun, provided only that Crusoe's stores included a library. Yet, as things then stood, Mr. Maxwell would not have been happy in such a life.

He was a scholarly person—study being his leading occupation, tutorship his needful work, and the pursuit of natural history his chief recreation. Dust lying on his rounded shoulders told its own tale, as did also the short-sighted spectacles, with which he peered into bush and brake as he passed. Careless of the cold, he had taken off his wide-awake, and had transformed it into a basket for ferns. Thereby could be seen more plainly the intellectual outline of his head—not a square solid head of the German type, but sensitive and highly developed, with brown wavy hair, already grey-streaked and showing a tendency to baldness at the crown; with anxious gentle eyes, able to see only one thing at a time; and with well-cut lips, in perpetual unrest. He was slightly over middle height, disposed to stoop, and hollow about the cheeks.

Poking tenderly in among leaves and brambles, coming upon a spider here, unearthing a worm there, Mr. Maxwell was perfectly contented. He had a close personal interest in the lives of these lower beings, and never passed one by without examination. The tiny swelling tree-buds, just breaking into green, brought a smile to his face, and his rather delicate fingers touched them now and then affectionately. 'Now, if Arthur were here——' he said.

Just then a shrill scream rang through the air from the road below. Nothing could be seen for the thick growth of trees between, but the scream rang out a second and a third time, and another voice called for help. Mr. Maxwell started into a man of action at once. As is the fashion with people wakened suddenly from a dream, he had not his wits very clearly about him. The fact of somebody in distress or peril was patent, however, and the scholarly gentleman rushed headlong through the wood, which divided the upper from the lower road; for Muriel's favourite view-peep over the wall lay at some distance.

That was a charge in good earnest! Brambles might scratch, but they could not stop a man so bent on flying to the rescue. Bits of his coat-tails remained behind, and the carefully-collected ferns were nowhere. But the empty wide-awake was nothing to him. Being a man of but one idea, he had no thought save for 'somebody in danger.'

Entirely forgetting that this bit of wood ended abruptly in a steep bank, some four feet high, and overhanging the lower road, he dashed frantically on, and suddenly found himself on the verge. Nothing for it but to leap. He had one glimpse of a little girl clinging to a young lady with cries of terror, while a large dog was worrying her dress. Then leap he did, and came down with a crash at Muriel Bertram's feet, and very nearly upon the dog's back. This was too much for canine courage, and the startled creature fled like a hare; while a half-shriek escaped Muriel, at the sight of her brother's tutor nearly measuring his length in the dust.

Maxwell struggled up, panting and bashful, trying to be unconscious of pain in his left knee.

'Thank you,' he said in response for Muriel's helping hand. 'I—I—heard you call, and was afraid something had happened.'

'The dog rather frightened us both. I don't know that there was real danger, but he seemed once as if he would fly at me,' said Muriel. 'See, little girl, you are quite safe now. The dog has gone, and your home lies the other way. Good-bye, and don't cry any more. Mr. Maxwell, you are not hurt, I hope? That was rather a long leap for you.'

'It was,' said Montgomery Maxwell, in a thoughtful tone. 'Yes, certainly it was—at my age. And yet there are men of active habits, past forty-two, who would think nothing of it.'

'Are you coming home?' asked Muriel, and he went with her directly, though his face had been turned the other way. Mr. Maxwell was not only Arthur Bertram's tutor: Muriel had for years studied languages and science with him; and after being for twelve years perpetually in and out of the house, he had gained the standing of confidential family-friend. It was a standing which he never abused. His caution was akin to that of a man walking blindfold among red-hot ploughshares.

'Arthur has gone for a game of foot-ball to-day,' said Muriel.

'Yes—I pressed it upon him. I am afraid of imbuing him too exclusively with my own tastes. A man should not be a mere copy of another,' said Mr. Maxwell.

'Did he tell you of my trouble last night?'

'He did—yes, he did mention what took place. Every word that passes there is safe with me, you know,' said the tutor deprecatingly.

'I know that. Mr. Maxwell, what do you think?'

Mr. Maxwell had a great dislike to give an opinion on any manner of event 'there.' He answered by a movement of his eyebrows.

'I can't see that I was wrong. John has been more than brother to me, and Rosie more than sister. How can I cast them off? Will anything ever bring grandpapa and John together again?'

Mr. Maxwell attempted no answer, but Muriel went on passionately, used to his reticence, and secure of his sympathy, 'It seems so sad—so terrible—such a family break. Sad enough that he should cast off aunt Constance—his own daughter. But parents don't always love their children alike—not always,' repeated the girl mournfully. 'We know that, don't we?—though I think I have not spoken of it to you since I was a child. Sometimes I feel as if I could not bear to go on keeping everything in, without a soul to tell my troubles to. Sibyl has gone, and Rosie I must not speak with, and John I am to pass as a stranger. There is nobody else except you. I can't talk of my troubles to new friends.'

'I think you may feel safe with me,' said Mr. Maxwell, in a tone of studied quietness. A new phase of the man came out here. Dreaminess and attention to hedge-rows were laid aside in Muriel's presence. He listened and watched intently for each word and look, yet scarcely seemed as if he did either.

'I know that. You never repeat a word, and I know it, or I could not speak. But about John—oh, it is so sad! As I was saying, it is bad enough about aunt Constance, though they say she never did get on well with grandpapa. But John—why, you know what he and John were to one another. It used to be almost as if he loved no one in the world except John. I don't know how John escaped spoiling, except that there was your influence: and yet you did not teach him. You had not the moulding of him as you have of Arthur. But those two could hardly bear to be apart. Do you remember how, when they came together in holidays and vacation, the perpetual "Where's John?" and "Where's grandfather?" was quite a little joke among us?'

Mr. Maxwell moved his head in sorrowful assent.

'And now, never to meet, never to exchange one word. John feels it sharply, I know; and grandpapa—don't you think he is unhappy? He often looks so. Do you think there is nothing to be done?'

'There is—avoiding further offence,' said Mr. Maxwell.

'That may keep the gap from widening, but it will not bring them together. Nothing else?'

Mr. Maxwell did not wish to suggest. He was a little afraid of Muriel's impetuosity. She might quote him, and cause a breach in a new quarter.

'I should like to act as peacemaker. What joy it would be!' she said, with a light in her eyes. 'But how to set to work? I feel like some one penned up in a room full of glass ornaments, afraid to turn for fear of causing a smash. Do you know, I am coming to the conclusion that life can't be happy without freedom?'

'The life shaped out for each one is the best,' said Mr. Maxwell.

'You don't mean that we must never even wish for things to be different?'

He thought of a good many answers, and was satisfied with none. Some hackneyed lines came to his relief:

> '"Happiness dwells in the temper within,
> And not in the outward estate."'

'I don't believe it, Mr. Maxwell. I never did see the force of that couplet. I am of a temper to be happy, I am sure, as much as anybody. No one can be brighter than I am—when in the mood.'

'Ay—when,' murmured the tutor with some emphasis.

'And when I am not, there is always a cause.'

'I suppose everybody would say that. Rosamond is always joyous, whatever her circumstances.'

'Rosamond is a born sunbeam, and I am a born barometer. That is the difference, and I can't change my nature. My state of mind always does, and always will depend upon

circumstances. Why, the mere state of the weather raises or depresses me. I could never become Rosamond.'

'No,' said Mr. Maxwell. He did not point out to her what she seemed to overlook—that her comparison between her cousin and herself only tended to prove the truth of his quotation.

'Sibyl and I are more alike—we always were. I love and admire Rosie's evenness, but I could not copy it. I am not quite sure how far I wish to do so. Hills must be laid low, as well as valleys filled up, before you can have a level plain, and I could not bear to miss one of my hill-tops. Would you wish to see me change, Mr. Maxwell?'

He half shook his head. 'Only for your own sake—a more peaceful spirit, perhaps. Pardon me, Muriel.'

'As if you might not say what you liked—you who have been my Roger Ascham,' said Muriel, smiling. 'Ah, you found out my moodiness many a time, didn't you? and yet you less than anybody. How good and patient you always were! O I wish I were a child again, running over to your house at all hours for my lessons, and Mrs. Maxwell always arranging for us three girls to meet there. Happy days those were, though I didn't always think so at the time. You used to tell me then that I was too much up and down; and now—now—but, Mr. Maxwell, how can I be bright—how can my life be other than sad? You know what my trials are. And you know the worst—the worst of all—which so few know. How can I be happy without a mother's love?'

Muriel's face was turned away suddenly, and her breath came in long catches of pain. A pang of sympathy shot through her gentle-hearted companion. To see her in distress was almost more than he could stand. He remembered how bitterly she had once cried over this same grief, when he had first known her as a dark-eyed impulsive child of twelve. He had told her then that it was a thing that she should not talk about out of her own family circle; and for twelve years she had rigidly obeyed that injunction—except-

ing none from the rule but her two intimate girl-friends, Rosamond and Sibyl Ray. But this day the wave rose high and broke. She was very lonely. He read the loneliness in her face, when she looked round at him again.

'Why is it, Mr. Maxwell?' she said. 'What can be the reason? If I only knew that,—only knew of something definite that I might try to set right, I would set it right at any cost. I think I could do or give up anything on earth for my mother's sake—if it would please her. Why is it that nothing I can do ever pleases her? You know it; you see it. Sometimes I lie awake at night, and ache all over with the longing for one loving word, one true motherly kiss. I never had either. Yet people can love me. Others don't hold me at arm's length and look upon me as something almost repulsive. Is there anything repulsive about me, which I don't know of? Yes, you may say "Muriel" in that indignant tone, and others would too, and yet I don't feel sure. For if my mother finds me so, there must be something. Mr. Maxwell, have you no idea of the reason? Why is it? How is it?'

Mr. Maxwell shook his head hopelessly. He had never yet solved the problem. 'Perhaps there is more love than appears on the surface,' he said.

'And you can say that—after all these years!'

'One can't always judge. Each of you is cold to the other.'

'Yes, now—how can it be otherwise? But have I never tried to win her?'

Another slow shake of the head.

'And her manner to Lilias—it isn't as if she were the same to us both. But I must not speak of that,' said Muriel hastily, a constrained look coming over her face. '*There* is where I feel the tempter's power.'

Montgomery Maxwell looked at her sorrowfully. He had what he often called to his mother a 'fatherly' longing over Muriel, a pitying desire to smooth her rough path. But he did not know how to comfort her. The thought in his

ras, 'God knows best for His children, and He has his
, and we must trust His love even in dark days.' His
ts, however, did not easily find expression. 'There
e resignation,' he said. 'One cannot look for happi-
ithout submission.'

iel sighed, and dropped the subject—relieved to have
her mind a little, but not comforted. They were
ıe Manor, and Mr. Maxwell stopped to say good-bye.
s not going in, he said, and he did not tell her that
not been coming in that direction at all. He turned
ı side-path, and went home by rather a détour, quite
:ent to the lengthened walk with a painful knee. He
have done or borne anything for Muriel.

CHAPTER V.

WAITING.

'PUNCTUALITY would not appear to be a cardinal virtue i Claverton, Mrs. Rokeby.'

'I think we are all dressed rather early. But Whittier' flymen are certainly not quite to be depended on,' said Mr Rokeby, a sweet and sad-faced widow, with a sweet and sa voice. 'Clissie dear, just look out of the window, and se if the fly is coming.'

Clarissa, rather a pretty girl of eighteen, dressed in hal mourning evening attire, crossed the little drawing-roo obediently. 'No,' she said. 'I see no signs of it. W can afford to wait a few minutes, Mr. Ray.'

She stood looking out, and drawing on a pair of whi gloves. The house was an odd little detached buildin nick-named Tea-Caddy Cottage by certain satirical o servers, though really rejoicing in the name of Copenh gen Villa; in shape tall and narrow, with a single ba window on each of the three floors, facing the road. M Rokeby and her two daughters were new-comers Claverton.

'Mamma—there she is!' cried Clarissa with eagerness

'Who, dear?'

'Never knew before that cabs, like ships, were of t feminine gender,' muttered the young man, from his static on the hearth-rug. He had come that day to pay a f days' visit to these old friends, with scant notice, and und plea of London over-work. The welcome of which he w

sure, he received, albeit no signs of the over-work showed in his healthy face—a face of good outline, sensible rather than brilliant; observant, though scarcely acute. No one, studying Cramer Ray, would have expected him to set the Thames on fire, or to climb to the top rung of any particular ladder. Nevertheless, many found a certain attraction in his good-humoured bearing, and he was a gentleman.

'O not the fly! Mamma, it is Muriel. O she is going on. I hoped she meant to call here.'

'If she did she could not be back before dark. Besides, to-morrow is her usual day.'

Neither Mrs. Rokeby nor Clarissa saw what somebody else did see, a sudden start forward, promptly controlled, on the part of Cramer Ray. He walked leisurely towards the window with an air of indifference.

There was a fourth person present in the room. A couch of peculiar make stood in a corner, and on it lay a bent twisted figure. Sophy Rokeby had been born thus, and no doctor's skill could lighten her heavy life-burden. She never had walked, and never would walk. The frail-looking fingers moved slowly over some work, and the eyes, bright with intelligence, took in all that came within their horizon.

'O Mr. Ray, you are too late. She has gone.'

'A great friend of yours?' asked Cramer Ray.

'The very best friend we have in Claverton,' enthusiastically answered Clissie, who had grown to be one of Muriel's most ardent admirers. If Muriel Bertram ranked as no shining light in her own family, there were other Claverton homes in which she was accounted a very sunbeam—and in Copenhagen Villa not least so. To Clarissa, a well-meaning and pleasant girl, afflicted with a young-ladyish want of occupation in life, the acquaintance came as an agreeable excitement. To Sophy, Muriel's visits were growing to be the bright spots in a grey landscape.

'How many friends have you managed to make in three months?' asked Cramer Ray drily.

'Well—there are degrees of friendship. But Miss Bertram is unlike everybody else. We all fell in love with her at first sight.'

'You called her something else just now.'

'Muriel. I ought not, only it is such a lovely name, I can't resist sometimes. I hope she will give me leave some day, but she is years older than I am—four or five and twenty. She comes to visit Sophy regularly once a week, if not oftener; and her kindness—oh, I can't describe it to you.'

'Just like——'

'Just like what?'

'Nothing in particular.'

'Just like whom, then?'

'Just like—a Lady Bountiful.'

'That was not what Mr. Ray meant to say,' Sophy put in quietly.

'Second thoughts are sometimes best,' said Cramer. 'Describe to me what this friend of yours is like.'

'A Spanish princess,' said Clissie readily. 'And the most unselfish sympathizing creature you ever saw. Everybody loves her.'

'She is such a bright Christian,' said Mrs. Rokeby. 'That is her chief beauty, it seems to me. I know I feel rebuked when I am with her, and see her never-failing cheerfulness.' Mrs. Rokeby sighed.

'So very lively?' asked Cramer, studying the twisted fringe of an antimacassar.

'It is not liveliness—not that at all,' said Clissie. 'I have seen her look sad. But she always has a smile, and always is so full of interest in other people's concerns. You never see her self-absorbed. Yet she has home troubles enough.'

'What sort?'

'O we are only learning about her gradually, but of course things come to our ears. Her own family don't

half appreciate her. Isn't it strange? Her mother and sister are two walking icicles, and her brother is a heavy sort of boy, without two ideas of his own; and her grandfather is perfectly dreadful.'

'Eh?' said Cramer, lifting his eyebrows. 'A real live ogre! I must have a glimpse of him.'

'No, but really, Mr. Ray—truly—you can't think what a man he is. He quarrels with everybody. It is quite the talk of the place. The other day I heard two gentlemen talking together, and the first said, "Our worthy friend of the Manor doesn't see me now, when we pass in the road;" and the second answered, "O are you too so distinguished by him? My turn next, I suppose;" and then they laughed.'

'Who does he quarrel with chiefly?'

'Anybody that doesn't agree with him. He has cast off one of his own daughters completely—years and years ago. She was engaged to a Mr.—what was the name, Sophy?—Irwin, I think—and Mr. Irwin lost his property—or his father did—and he went into business. Mr. Rivers wanted his daughter to give him up, for he is desperately proud, and won't look at a business man—so you will not suit him, Mr. Ray.'

Cramer knitted his brows, seeming not to relish the remark. 'I am aware of that.'

'And his daughter refused to give up Mr. Irwin, so Mr. Rivers gave her up instead. They say her name is never spoken in his hearing. Constance—such a pretty name! Do you think she was right? It must have been a very difficult question for her. What do you think?'

'I'll decide—when I stand in her position.'

'They say that if Mr. Rivers once takes offence, he never forgives.'

'Did Miss Bertram tell you that?'

'Miss Bertram! As if we ever came near the subject with her! Oh no; only every one in Claverton knows about them. And then there is this last affair. Mr. John

Rivers is such a favourite, that many people seem indignant at his being cast off.'

'John Rivers! Nonsense! He has not split with him! Impossible!' Cramer exclaimed.

'Why, do you know him?' asked Clissie, surprised at the outburst.

'I am distantly connected with the family. John Rivers' wife was a Ray before marriage.'

'Was she? I did not know that,' said Clissie, greatly interested.

'Yes. Rather a far-off cousin of mine. I have not seen her for eight years.'

'Then you must have a second tie with them too. Surely some one told me that Miss Bertram's uncle in India, Major Rivers, had married a sister of Mrs. John Rivers. I never heard their surname. I should have thought of you directly.'

'Sibyl Ray—yes. But Rosamond and Sibyl are really first-cousins, though brought up as sisters.'

'Who by?'

'Rosamond's mother. She died soon after Sibyl's marriage; about four years ago, that is, or not quite so much. Chesney Rivers carried off Sibyl on his return from furlough, but I heard few particulars. Rosamond was married nine years ago, not long before my last visit. In fact, I stayed with her and her husband.'

'And those two—Rosamond and Sibyl you call them—were great friends of Miss Bertram?'

'The three made a most devoted trio.'

'Were your cousins very charming girls?'

'John Rivers and his uncle must have thought so.'

'How odd for Miss Bertram to have a friend of her own age for aunt! Then you really stayed in Claverton eight years ago?'

'No, in Bushby,' said the young man.

'Oh yes, I forgot—at Mr. John Rivers'. But I suppose *you were in and* out here?'

'Occasionally.'

'And you have never heard about this quarrel, or whatever it is to be called, between Mr. Rivers and Mr. John Rivers?'

'I never hear anything. Rosamond detests letter-writing, and Sibyl is in India. Besides, they would not be likely to mention such a matter.'

'Were you ever in Claverton itself, before that visit? I mean, did you ever visit your cousins?'

'Once, as a boy, for some weeks. Rosamond and Sibyl were pretty little creatures, a few years younger than myself. I used to patronise them in boyish style.'

'I dare say. Did they know Miss Bertram then?'

'She was in and out.'

'Why, she is an old friend of yours. How curious and interesting! You will enjoy seeing her again.'

'That fly of yours is an unconscionable time coming,' said Cramer, with a hasty movement towards the door. 'I'll take a look out.'

Cramer, standing at the little front gate, forgot all about the fly, which he might have seen approaching. His face relaxed into a restless expression, and clouded over, the moment he felt himself unobserved. 'What did bring me?' he muttered. 'The barrier is as strong as ever—sheer insanity for me to indulge again in any such dream. She will never follow in her aunt's footsteps. Could I wish it for her? Wish! I could wish anything. How all this brings back the old days to me! Clissie's rattle is past endurance. I have a great mind to return to London to-morrow. Absurd to come here, just when I seemed to be settling down to a possibility of something else. "Spanish princess"—don't I know that look? O Muriel! There I am! I shall be as bad as ever in a week. I had better cut my visit short, and go back at once, before I have a chance of seeing her. I think I will.'

But he did not.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT IN US LIES.

'MAXWELL has done for himself now,' said Mr. Rivers.

'Mr. Maxwell! What has happened to him?'

'Slipped and hurt his knee somehow, the other day, and, instead of taking care, he has gone walking about, foolish fellow, and made it worse.'

'Very vexatious,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'Arthur's studies are so important just now.'

'Arthur must go to Maxwell, instead of Maxwell coming here. That is all the difference.'

'Poor Mr. Maxwell!' Muriel had exclaimed. 'He must have hurt it that day——'

She left the sentence unfinished, but Mr. Rivers demanded more, and she had to tell of the tutor's involuntary leap.

'Ridiculous,' was Mr. Rivers' comment. 'He ought to remember that he is not growing younger.'

'Forty-two is nothing as to age,' remarked Mrs. Bertram rather jealously, that being her own. 'Mr. Maxwell is not more than forty-two. But there never was such a man for making blunders.'

'Feckless—utterly feckless,' said Mr. Rivers. 'He runs a-muck through the world, never seeing what lies before his own nose.'

'Arthur is his admirer to any amount,' remarked Lilias.

'John thought just as much of him,' escaped Muriel's lips.

Mr. Rivers frowned. 'John might have done better in *his hands.* Mr. Maxwell is a sensible man in some respects,

—none of your meddling Methodists. He keeps his religion to himself; thinks what he likes, and nobody is the wiser. Just as it should be. He would not teach long in my house, otherwise. I have no patience with cant. Mr. Fielding seems disposed to take up with that sort of thing, and I have given him a piece of my mind this very morning.'

'I hope Mr. Fielding may be the wiser for it,' remarked Mrs. Bertram, when her father was beyond hearing.

'Mamma, *he* will be forbidden the house next,' said Lilias calmly.

'And who next after him, I wonder?' said Muriel hastily. 'It does not seem to be one of our aims to "live peaceably with all men."'

'What do you mean?' Mrs. Bertram asked.

'Mamma, I was just thinking of that, "living peaceably with all men." It is a command to all Christians. "All" means all, with no exceptions. It seems to me that as a household we don't attempt to obey.'

'Your grandfather is responsible, not we.'

'I know that, but——'

'I suppose nobody ever gets through life without some disagreements,' said Lilias, looking at Muriel.

'There ought to be none.'

'Quite impossible,' decided Mrs. Bertram.

'Mamma, the Bible is plain enough,' said Muriel, with an effort, and the effort gave to her an air of bluntness. '"Live peaceably with all men." "Follow peace with all men."'

'The Bible gives general rules, but of course no one expects to do exactly all that,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'If my friends do unpleasant things, of course it causes an unpleasant feeling, though I am quite willing to forgive them after a time.'

'Grandpapa does not forgive.'

'No. That is his peculiarity. We all have our little idiosyncrasies,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'People understand him by this time, and no doubt make excuses.'

'People may. I don't see that excuses will serve befo God,' said Muriel in a low voice. 'And if Christians a commanded to live peaceably with all men, then any ki of peace-breaking must be un-Christian.'

'Pity you ever do it,' Lilias murmured, almost to hers

'At all events, the Bible does not command girls to jud their grandfathers,' said Mrs. Bertram, with some spirit. S could say a keen thing, when it suited her purpose, thou generally preferring to use the weapon of ladylike unconce 'As for that text, which you keep harping on, you seem have forgotten the first half—"As much as lieth in you, l peaceably with all men." If it does not lie in us, we ca do it.'

'I don't think the text means that.'

'It means nothing else,' said Mrs. Bertram decisive 'So far as you are able, live peaceably with everybody. I one is not always able. It is quite out of the question sor times to help showing annoyance—and, in fact, one's o self-respect and dignity sometimes demand it. I have notion of letting people behave to me exactly as they choo

'John preached a sermon on that text once,' said Mur 'He said the simple meaning of the text was, "As much lieth in *you*, live peaceably." That is, "You do your p and if the other side breaks the peace, you are not to blame

'Precisely like one of John's ideas. It is a pity he d not act upon his own advice.'

'How?'

'With respect to your grandfather.'

'What could he do less?' asked Muriel.

'He could do more. A little care in conforming to y grandfather's views would have prevented this wretcl division, and all the talk that is made about it.'

'But he does not think with grandpapa. He must honest. He can't do things that he feels to be wrong, because they are grandpapa's wish.'

'Nonsense. John used not to be so squeamish.'

'No. He is different now,' said Muriel, flushing. 'I think John would give up everything in life sooner than go against his conscience.'

'The very thing I complain of. I can't bear dogmatic ways. It is a good thing on the whole that he and you are not much together, or you would soon be as bad as himself.'

'I think I feel with John now—in almost everything.'

'Well, pray keep your feelings to yourself, and don't pester your grandfather with them, that is all I beg.'

The postman made a diversion, but the diversion proved to be sad in kind. A letter from India, with a black edge, startled them all. Mrs. Bertram exclaimed with dismay, as she glanced it through, 'O Lilias!—they have lost the twins.'

Muriel's heart ached. 'Not both!' she said.

'Both together, in one week. Cholera.'

'It will half-kill Sibyl. What does uncle Chesney say?'

Muriel could hardly speak for tears. She had so loved these little unknown cousins—had so longed for the day when they should come home. And now both were gone. She could scarcely believe it.

'Is the baby well?' asked Lilias.

'Yes. Chesney does not say much.' Mrs. Bertram read aloud the letter:

'"MY DEAR MARY,

'"I can only write a few lines this mail. God has visited us very heavily. Our precious little twins have been taken from us—cholera, both of them. Rosie was only ill a few hours. Muriel lingered longer, but suffered sorely.

'"I feel stunned, and can give no particulars. Sibyl's submission is a marvel to me. She is crushed, but does not utter a murmur. God grant she may not break down under it. This will decide me to bring her home as soon as possible.

'"Our little darlings were laid to rest two days ago. The world looks very blank and desolate to us.

'"Baby keeps well, I am thankful to say. Sibyl sends

love particularly to Muriel, and wishes her at once to see or write to Rose. I can write no more letters this mail. Love to all.

'"Your affectionate brother,

'"CHESNEY RIVERS."'

'Poor fellow!' he always feels things so much,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'But he will get back his cheerfulness sooner than Sibyl. I am afraid your grandfather will be vexed at his wishing that letter written. We shall have to go into mourning.'

Muriel fled to her own room, unable to stand more. She felt as if this grief were her own, quite apart from her mother and sister; for Sibyl was her own dearest friend—far more to her than Lilias had ever been. The feeling was an unfortunate one, tending to strengthen her isolation.

She shed some bitter tears for her friend that afternoon, wondering how Sibyl's frail health and sensitive temperament would bear the double shock. And how John and Rosamond would grieve for Sibyl! And how hard and bitter it seemed to be cut off from them at such a time! Some weeping on her own account followed, and then she took out her writing-case. It might be as well to have a letter to Rosamond ready, in case Mr. Rivers should consent to its being posted.

Muriel did not expect that he would. Nevertheless the bare possibility, despite the sadness of her subject, brought something of pleasure with it.

'Poor uncle Chesney—so proud as he was of those two—so lovely as they must have been. Rosie, this is a sad world!' she wrote. 'John would not tell me to be "always rejoicing" now. It seems to me as if my life were more like never rejoicing. I have not much to make me happy, certainly. Nothing but coldness and misunderstanding on every side. There are a few who love me in Claverton, but I am cut off from all my dearest and best.

'And tell him I have not found my key-note yet, and don't know when I shall. I am certainly pitched in the minor key, but what key I don't know.

'O Rosie, to think of Sibyl—our delicate wood-flower as we used to call her, only able to smile when the sun shines. She must be crushed indeed! How will she ever bear such a sorrow!'

And then Muriel closed the letter, stamping and directing, ready for the post. A little later she went downstairs, and found Mrs. Bertram with Lilias starting in the carriage.

'O here you are,' said Mrs. Bertram coldly. 'I supposed you did not wish to drive out to-day.'

'No, thank you,' said Muriel in a low voice.

'You are very foolish to go and fret yourself poorly,' said Mrs. Bertram, noticing her paleness. 'It is very sad for Chesney and Sibyl, but the children are nothing to you personally—were not, I mean. Lilias and I are going to choose some mourning. What do you wish about it for yourself?'

'I don't mind. I can have the same as Lilias. Do you know where grandpapa is?'

Mrs. Bertram did not, but she and Lilias had hardly started before he appeared. 'Are you going out?' he aske 'You may come for a turn along the road with me.'

'May' was equivalent to 'must.' Muriel went for her hat and jacket, revolving in her mind what to say to him. She walked by his side in silence for a while, determined to wait till they neared the post-pillar. He was the first himself to approach the subject. 'Very melancholy for Chesney, he said. 'One would not have expected it. But that sort of thing is the worst of India.'

'It will bring them home sooner.'

'I hope so. Unfortunate if Sibyl were to fall into confirmed ill-health.'

'Did mamma show you the letter?'

'Yes.'

Muriel's heart beat. 'Grandpapa, I have written to Rosamond, as Sibyl wishes, about their loss. I thought you could not mind it for this once—for such a reason. I have brought the letter out to post.'

He was fairly taken by surprise, and his only answer was a brief 'Humph!' She let him see the letter in her hand, walked deliberately from his side across the road, and dropped it into the pillar. Ample time was allowed him to protest; but it was not till she came back again to his side that he said angrily—'What do you mean by this?'

'It was Sibyl's wish, grandpapa.'

'I don't care whose wish it was. Daring me to my face!'

'No. I only took silence for consent,' said Muriel, with a hardy calmness which she was far from feeling. 'Sibyl would have been so grieved if Rosamond had heard it in any other way. I thought you could not mind, as you did not speak.'

'My orders have been clear enough. Mind, Muriel! No more shuffling and evading of them.'

Muriel's dark eyes looked straight up into his flushing face. 'Grandpapa, I don't shuffle, at all events. If I ever think it right to disobey you, I do it openly.'

'Think it right! You impertinent little chit! Right! That's a spirit of Methodistical submission, I suppose.'

'No, grandpapa.' She spoke very clearly. 'If mine were Methodistical submission only, you would find you had a different spirit to deal with. I am aunt Constance over again in character.'

'Never say that name in my hearing again.' He spoke fiercely, yet with trembling lips that hardly could utter the command. 'Your aunt is dead and buried to me.'

Muriel thought the conversation had gone far enough in critical channels. She made no reply, and they walked on in solemn silence, side by side. There was rather a wonder in her own mind at the curious impulse which had made her *say so much.* She did not often venture thus.

Having gone some distance along the Upper Claverton Road, encountering nobody, they turned homewards. Muriel's eyes were downcast, and her thoughts busy. Suddenly catching the sound of a footstep, she glanced up.

The eyes that met hers were the last eyes in the world that she would have expected to meet. A young man, walking close to the bank, half-paused, lifted his hat and bowed. Muriel hesitated, with a sense of utter bewilderment, and for a moment her heart almost stopped beating.

Mr. Rivers looked round.

'Come on, Muriel,' he said harshly.

Muriel bowed gravely, and obeyed. Every vestige of colour had faded from her face.

'Who was that?' demanded her grandfather.

'Mr. Ray.'

'Cramer Ray?'

'Yes.'

'Did you know the fellow was here?' A good many people of Mr. Rivers' acquaintance were honoured with that particular designation.

'No, grandpapa.'

'Mind—you have nothing to do with him, nor he with you. You never shall have.'

Muriel walked the rest of the way home in a dream. Old memories thronged wildly. She had thought that past dream dead, yet here it was, springing up again in full strength.

Colour did not come back again that evening. She sat about, white and preoccupied, absolutely wrapped up in her own thoughts.

CHAPTER VII.

TEA-CADDY COTTAGE.

WHATEVER might have been Muriel's feelings, it was with bright face that she entered Copenhagen Villa on the follow ing afternoon. She acted upon a settled principle, whe paying visits of loving help or cheer to her Master's sufferin ones,—and there were others in Claverton besides Sophy not a few, who hailed her footsteps,—a settled rule, never t let her own private troubles give her a gloomy look. Muri knew the worth of a smile to these tried ones. The pity wa that she did not follow the same rule in her daily home-life.

Sophy lay on her couch as usual, with only her mother i the room. Clarissa and their guest had gone out for a wall sorely against the will of the former, but she found Cram Ray beyond her management. He had his own plans, bu was in no mind to meet Muriel Rivers, with Clissie's ey taking note of the encounter. To all her hints of a desi that he should be at home when Miss Bertram called, h opposed a gentlemanly determination that Sophy's hou with Muriel should not be invaded.

'How are you to-day, Sophy?' Muriel asked tenderly leaning over the couch with her sweetest look.

'Pretty well. Just as usual,' Sophy answered. 'Onl always better for seeing you.'

'That would be quick work indeed, the very mome after I have come,' Muriel answered playfully, taking a se by her side. 'I am punctual to-day, Sophy. Just thr o'clock, so we have a nice time before us. What shall v do? Read or talk?'

'Talk to me a little first. I love your voice both ways. Tell me how you are yourself, dear Miss Bertram.'

'I—oh, I am almost always well,' said Muriel. 'We had some sad news yesterday, about the loss of some dear little cousins in India from cholera.'

Sophy and Mrs. Rokeby were full of sympathy, but Muriel would not dwell upon the subject. She knew how much the poor crippled girl depended on such hours as this for cheerfulness, and talked lightly of various matters. More serious things after a while came to the surface, but Muriel was at pains still to preserve a bright manner.

The habitual tone of mind of the gentle little widow, Mrs. Rokeby, was certainly not cheerful. Life had ever showed through sad-coloured spectacles, as seen by her eyes, no less before than during her widowhood, and her religion caught a reflection of the same tint.

It was a favourite plan for Muriel to bring with her a small blank book, wherein were written extracts from prose and verse, to which she was ever adding. She had thought of her invalid friends rather than of herself in making choice of extracts, so it came to pass that they breathed almost without exception a spirit of trust, peace, and thankfulness. Mrs. Rokeby also possessed an extract-book, from which she sometimes treated Muriel by way of variety. Muriel did not greatly encourage this. Mrs. Rokeby had a particular love for verses describing the present world as 'a vale of weeping,' 'a valley of Bochim,' 'a desolate wilderness,' 'a bleak and howling desert.' Muriel thought Sophy had enough of this foggy atmosphere on other days, and wanted to pull her up to something better.

In fact, it may be doubted whether Muriel were not actually helping Sophy Rokeby to a higher ledge of Christian attainment than that on which she herself had taken stand.

'O I am forgetting,' Sophy said suddenly, when she had lain for some time in her usual half-reclining position, eagerly drinking in every word—'I am quite forgetting. You won't

mind this being such a poor little thing, Miss Bertram, but I did want to give you a present of my own making. If it were only worth more!'

She pulled a little marker or illuminated card from under her pillow, folded in white paper, small and daintily finished. Though unable to do more than sit up partially, and unable to work long at anything, she had a great taste for colours and facility in design.

The central part was taken up by three words in massive gold—

'*Soyez toujours joyeux.*'

Round these ran partly a graceful wreath of forget-me-nots, the two ends being almost joined by a tiny bunch of daisy-buds, half-open and pink-tipped. There were two other texts, printed in small black letters upon gold scrolls. Above was—'The joy of the Lord is your strength;' and below—'Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.'

'Dear Sophy, that is kind. How very pretty. I shall keep it in my Bible, and prize it for your sake. The flowers look almost as if one might take them up, and what sweet words you have chosen!'

'I seemed to fancy the French ones more than the English, 'Always rejoicing'—though it is the same thing. Miss Bertram, I chose that text because it is so like you. Mamma and I both think so. "Toujours joyeux"—"toujour joyeux"—just what you are. I never saw it in anybody else

'I am afraid you know very little of me if you think so Muriel said rather gravely.

'Ah, but it is an easy thing to see. One can't well be mistaken. Miss Bertram, what does make the difference between you and others?'

'There is no such difference as you think.'

'No, you won't allow it—you will not think well of yourself. But other people must see what you are. Please don

go on denying it, but just tell me how it is that you are always happy, and so many real Christians are not so. Mamma and I have determined to ask you.'

Muriel's mind was in a mixed state, having on the one side certain conscience-thrusts, and on the other a disposition to wonder whether, after all, it might not be humility on her part which made her rate herself so low. Was she not pretty uniformly cheerful?

'Hardly fair, Sophy,' she said, smiling. 'You will not let me deny what you say, and you insist on my explaining what I do not allow. But suppose we take the idea more in a general way. Every Christian ought to have as his motto —"Toujours joyeux."'

'That is not common,' said Mrs. Rokeby.

'But the "ought" stands unchanged. It ought to be universal amongst all who love the Saviour.'

Mrs. Rokeby shook her head. 'Such a world of sorrow,' she said. 'Quite impossible.'

'I know there is sorrow, but there is joy to balance it,' said Muriel earnestly—just as earnestly as if she had never argued on Mrs. Rokeby's side of the question at all, and quite forgetting at the moment that she had ever done so.

'They must be Christians with a great deal of assurance, who can feel anything of joy,' sighed Mrs. Rokeby. 'Not poor halting doubting creatures, scarcely knowing whether they may hope to be saved at all at the last.'

'Isn't that a distrust on their part of the promise, "My sheep shall never perish"?'

'How are they to be sure that they are His sheep?'

'They can't be sure unless they have come to Him. But they can't come without knowing it, and if they have come, it is dishonouring Him to doubt. "He will in no wise cast out." That word can't be broken.'

'No—but, my dear Miss Bertram, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."'

'Yes, indeed—there can't be any greater danger than self-

confidence. But that is very different from having a firm trust in Christ.'

Mrs. Rokeby sighed. Hers was a hopeless dolorous kind of religion. She dimly believed, and faintly hoped, but possessed no happy confidence. Her view of the spiritual life was almost as if she thought she had to struggle up to heaven, by means perforce of her own faith, with no desire on the part of her Saviour to land her there. She had a vague impression that He was always turning from her in displeasure. Conscious of her failures, she stumbled along with downcast eyes, mourning over them, and never seeing the outstretched Hand of love, waiting to bear her up. She hoped He might keep His promises, and bring her safe to heaven at last, if she clung to Him, but she did not feel certain. The world was very insidious, and her heart very deceitful, and Satan very strong. It seemed to be quite a mooted point with her whether Christ or Satan was to prove the 'stronger than he' in her spiritual life.

A very up-and-down spiritual life hers was too, only with more of the down than the up, by a considerable amount. Every time she slipped, she went through the same dismal experience. She always prescribed for herself a season of repentance, almost to be called penance, during which she held aloof from her Saviour's smiles, doubted altogether her own acceptance through His blood, and believed she must not look for pardon till she had accomplished a due amount of sorrowing. Then she was comforted, until another stumble came, when the whole had to be acted out again. And her conscience being tender, and slips and stumbles being many, she passed the greater portion of her time 'in penitence'—self-banished from peace.

'I do not seem to know where this text comes from,' said Muriel, taking up the card.

'"The joy of the Lord is your strength." That is from the eighth of Nehemiah. Wouldn't it be a beautiful motto for one to live up to? O did you mean the last text

That is from the twelfth of Deuteronomy. And there is another in the twenty-eighth.'

Muriel took up the little Bible, found the last-named place, and read aloud the verse, guided to it by a pencil-mark:

'"Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies——"'

Muriel paused very thoughtfully. Had she so rejoiced?

'One does not always realise it as a positive duty,' she said. 'It seems so often rather a privilege—a "may," but not a "must."'

'It was "must" with them, was it not? "Thou shalt rejoice in all." I have been going over that so in my mind. I on my couch—mamma over her house-keeping—servants over dusting and brushing—tradespeople over business—you over helping and visiting those in trouble—all of us at all times to rejoice. What a world of rejoicing it might be—of joy even in sorrow!'

'Yes, but it is a particular kind of rejoicing,' said Muriel, feeling herself rather in the position of learner than teacher, though Sophy was perfectly unconscious of this.

'"Before the Lord;"' not merely in the doing, apart from Him. Doesn't that mean just bringing Him into everything—doing all in the name of Jesus?'

'And looking up for His smile, finding delight in His pleasure,' said Muriel.

'That would be the joy of all joys, would it not? O Miss Bertram, you have so helped me to-day,' said Sophy, half-tearfully. 'You know so much more of it all than I do. You have tried it already. I have always thought it was enough to be just patient. I did not know I had actually to lie still here and rejoice.'

'Does it sound strange to you, Sophy, that to me it seems almost easier work to lie still and do so, than to go about in the thick of work and temptations, and then to keep up the "always rejoicing?"'

Sophy looked up slowly. 'Ah,' she said, 'only try it for one month! Not that I wish that for you. But the temptations come, and I can't run away from them; and even little thing is work to me.'

'That was rather a complaining remark of mine,' said Muriel, smiling. 'But I know better really, Sophy, and would give a great deal if you could be up and about.'

'It looks as if rejoicing would be no difficulty at all then,' Sophy said rather soberly.

The hour slipped away quickly, and in the interest of conversation neither Sophy nor her mother thought of mentioning Cramer Ray's name. In truth, his very existence was forgotten by them. Mrs. Rokeby sat and listened with interest, but sorrowfully. It seemed to her that this command to the Israelites had nothing to do with herself. How could *she* rejoice, poor failing creature, leaving undone what ought to be done, and doing what ought not to be done? Clearly, whatever other people might feel, *her* duty was to go on in bitterness all her days. This was a satisfactory decision for one whose natural inclinations led her to act in such wise.

Muriel having said good-bye, Clarissa came back alone. 'I could not get Mr. Ray in,' she said. 'He brought me to the gate, and went off like a shot. What an odd man he is! He seemed bent on not arriving till just after Miss Bertram had gone, as I told him she never stayed after four, and yet he evidently didn't want to be back later than this. Is he afraid of her, I wonder?'

CHAPTER VIII.

PRACTISING AFTER PREACHING.

EL had yet a call to pay on her road home, and she
:d at the Maxwells' house, not in the least aware of
mpatient eyes watching her movements from a distance.
as a disorderly room into which she was ushered by
less untidy little maid-servant. Books lay everywhere,
ıpers filled up gaps. Montgomery was on a sofa—the
ather, since the house contained not a second—with a
olume close to his eyes, and another open at his elbow.
re was also a little old lady in an arm-chair, with a
shade over her eyes, and some knitting in her hands.
ess almost total in the mistress and housekeeper,
ıed with utter indifference to appearances on the part
master, served to explain any lack of neatness in sur-
ngs.

y I come in?' Muriel asked, and Montgomery started
ing his big volume fall with a bang.

I beg your pardon—oh, I beg—ah!' and a sharp
of pain showed in his face as he grasped Muriel's
steadying himself against the table. 'Mother, here is
'

Maxwell, if you don't lie down directly, I shall go,'
uriel with decision. 'I thought your knee was to be
ill.'

ssure you I have not moved for hours.'

iel stood waiting, refusing to advance till he had re-
his proper position. Then she crossed over, and
fectionately kissed the old lady.

'That's a good girl,' murmured Mrs. Maxwell. 'I knew you wouldn't let a whole week go by without coming. It always cheers me to see you, my dear.'

She talked of 'seeing' still, after the fashion of the blind. Muriel sat holding her hand, listening to details of housekeeping troubles, giddiness of young servants, and bodily aches and pains.

'How are you all at home?' Montgomery broke in. 'Arthur told me of your uncle's sad loss.'

'I can't think how Sibyl will bear it,' said Muriel sorrowfully.

'She will be brought through. God will bring her through somehow. He doesn't lay on His children a heavier burden than they can bear. Men sometimes take a heavier burden of their own accord,' added Montgomery in a meditative tone. 'Yes, I have seen that done.'

'It seems almost enough to kill her—so delicate as she is.'

Montgomery shook his head slowly—half in sympathy, half in dissent.

'She has one child still?' Mrs. Maxwell remarked.

'O yes—the baby. But baby can't take the place of the other two.'

'No, my dear. No one can ever do that.'

Muriel was silent for a minute.

'Mr. Maxwell, do you want a compliment?' she suddenly asked.

'Who from?'

'Grandpapa. He says you are a very sensible person.'

'I am glad to hear it. Mr. Rivers does not often—does not think every one that,' said Mr. Maxwell, looking pleased.

'Not John, for instance.'

'Ah, poor John!'

'Don't you care to hear how you are so sensible?'

'I should like it indeed—if you are not betraying confidence.'

'O no. You keep your religion to yourself, and think *what you like*, and nobody is the wiser.'

Hum—yes—ha—just so,' faltered Montgomery, blushing to the roots of his hair. 'Yes. O yes; of course. I think I see Mr. Rivers' meaning.'

Muriel said nothing. Montgomery turned more fully in her direction, leaning on his elbow, and trying with his short-sighted eyes to reach her face.

'You are sure he said just that, Muriel?'

'Yes. I was struck with the form of expression.'

'Think what I like, and nobody the wiser. Just so,' reiterated the unhappy tutor, not in the least wishing to confirm the assertion, but at a loss what else to say.

'I am sure he meant it most kindly,' said Muriel.

'He meant it—no doubt—O yes—no doubt,' said Montgomery, with a beseeching look at Muriel. 'Would you like it said of you?'

'I am only a woman,' she said. 'I may claim a right to have my own thoughts, but I should like folks to be the wiser for them.'

And then she turned smilingly to chat with Mrs. Maxwell, leaving Montgomery in a crushed condition. Had Muriel meant reproof? Did she despise him for cowardliness? He reached that point while she was sitting there. After she was gone he went deeper.

His words to her at parting were:

'I see you think I have been weak.'

'You have been prudent,' she said with a slight play of feature.

'Yes—prudent. That has been my aim. Without prudence no one could have taught long in Mr. Rivers' house. My great dread was always lest I should be banished.'

'It would have been a great loss to us, if you had been.'

'That I felt, though indeed the loss to myself would have been greater. But you see, if I had insisted on talking of my religious views, Mr. Rivers would soon have had enough of me.'

'*Yes, perhaps so,' said Muriel.*

'And I have tried, from time to time, to use my influence rightly with all of you—at least I trust so.'

'I am sure you have.'

'So perhaps after all it has been for the best that I have acted thus.'

'It has been the smoothest course.'

'But you are not satisfied. You think I have been too prudent. You would say that I have held my tongue too much.'

'No, I would not say anything,' she answered cheerfully. 'I cannot teach you, Mr. Maxwell. Grandpapa's words struck me, and I thought they might strike you. That is all. Good-bye, and take care of your knee.'

No efforts on the part of Mrs. Maxwell could draw him into conversation again that evening. She sat and yawned, poor old lady, and made occasional remarks about Muriel. But the silent mood gained the day. She yielded, and went quietly to sleep.

It was no small matter to Montgomery. Muriel to blame him! That was a new order of things. He was not humiliated, in the sense of suffering from wounded pride, being a man of lowly spirit, with little pride to be wounded. But he stood abashed.

Nobody the wiser for his thoughts; nobody the better for his religion! Was that it?

Not quite, and he was thankful to be able to say so much. He could point to John, Muriel, Arthur—perhaps also to Sibyl and Rosamond—as more or less gainers from his influence. But even there the influence had been chiefly of the indirect kind.

Had he verily smothered his religion into a back corner? Had he preferred the smooth and easy path of a cowardly prudence? Had he been unfaithful to his God?

For Montgomery Maxwell was in heart as well as in profession a Christian man, only a somewhat timid if not temporising one. And these were grave questions for a *servant of* God. Muriel did not know to what a night of

self-searchings she had condemned him. His knee was not the better for agitation of mind next day, and Arthur, for almost the first time within his own recollection, found an absorbed and listless teacher.

Meanwhile Muriel had an encounter on her way homewards. She walked quickly, to avoid being overtaken by the dusk; and where the Upper Claverton Road branched off from the Lower, she turned downwards. Just then she heard, almost without noticing it, a rustle among the trees, and some one ran lightly down the green bank. Muriel lifted her eyes and saw—Cramer Ray.

'Forgive me,' he said. 'I knew you must pass here.'

Muriel's face grew as colourless as it had done the night before. She gave him her hand, but simply said, 'I cannot wait; I am forbidden.'

'Will you not walk home by the upper road?'

'Not if you do. Your way and mine must not be the same.'

'Nothing more than that, after eight years!' he said, as if he felt himself slighted. Then, with a change of tone, which brought over her a sudden rush of suffocating feelings, 'Muriel, this once—only this once—just for a few paces.'

He could not see how sorely she was pulled by a very agony of temptation. Eight years truly had passed, as he said, since the half-formed and roughly-sundered engagement had shaken her girlish nature to its core. The two had never met since. Now it might be a doubtful question how far the man who had satisfied the young unformed mind of seventeen years could offer all required by the matured character and intellect of twenty-five. Cramer Ray was not of a nature to expand greatly. He had reached his full growth early, and there stood still. Muriel had opened out rapidly, and would do so more. But no such doubt occurred to her in these few seconds, and little was required to dazzle her in contrast with her own home. Duty held a strong sway, however, over Muriel's actions.

'This once—for a few paces,' he pleaded. 'It may be years before we meet again.'

He did not see the struggle. He only knew how she drew up her head.

'No, Mr. Ray. I must say good-bye.'

'I must see you again,' he said impetuously. 'Where shall it be? If I come to the Manor, I shall be turned from the door like a dog. Will you meet me at Copenhagen Villa?—no, you won't'—as he read the expression of her face. 'Forgive me again. You think it would be underhand. But the matter looks different to me. I am not bound. And surely he is utterly unreasonable—almost in his second childhood. Is there no way?'

'I can do nothing. Come to the Manor, if you like,' said Muriel calmly; 'but I cannot promise you admittance.'

'And will you give me no word of encouragement?'

'I am absolutely forbidden. Mr. Ray, this must not go on.'

'Muriel—Muriel—would you, if you were not forbidden?'

Her lips were quivering beyond the power of repression. Cramer caught her hand in his own, but she drew it away.

'No, I can say nothing. I will not say anything. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye—but I can wait now,' he said.

She heard the words as she turned away, and they were the last spoken. Cramer stood looking after her in fervent admiration, at the moment fully satisfied. When he came to think the matter over coolly, it seemed to him that he had received very scant response indeed.

Muriel went swiftly and resolutely homewards, never stopping till she found herself in her own room. There she cast hat and gloves aside, and set herself to a restless pacing up and down in her jacket. Burning tears dropped at intervals. Long-buried hopes and long-sleeping associations came up vividly. It seemed as if the old trouble had woke to life with a new power. She was racked with a wild longing for somebody to hear, somebody to sympathize

loneliness pressed upon her very heavily that hour. times there came a throb of joy, in connection with er's parting words, followed by yet more bitter weep- For how hopeless it all seemed. Wait! Wait till ? He could not wait a life time. And Mr. Rivers and Bertram were in full accord on this matter. Muriel at she could not disobey—could not, and would not. had always strongly held her to the principle of ence, and so had Mr. Maxwell.

CHAPTER IX.

JOHN'S HOME.

THERE was a great charm about Rosamond Rivers. She had nothing of the Spanish princess, or of any other species of royalty, in her appearance, being small and plump and blue-eyed. But her face gleamed with perpetual good-humour, and its varying smile rippled like summer waves upon the sand.

Traces of tears showed in those same bright eyes, as she sat on the tiger-skin rug one evening. Rosamond never took thought for personal dignities, least of all when she had her five boys about her. The floor seemed just as well suited to her little person as a sofa or an arm-chair. Constance, the only girl and the eldest of six children, chose to sit decorously on the stuffed tiger-head, with the fire-light dancing alike over its glassy eyes and her veil of fair hair. The aim of jackets, knickerbockers, and baby-frocks seemed to be to gain the nearest possible position with regard to Rosamond. She was perfectly willing, and laughingly submitted to the boyish struggles around her. Tears she might have shed, but nothing could keep Rosamond long from smiling, and she knew not the meaning of the word depression.

Amid a chorus of laughing cries, John Rivers walked in.

'O papa! papa! give me a ride on your back—and me—and me.'

John evidently felt that he had no choice but to obey. He laid aside the grave face with which he had entered, and trotted one after another around the room with exemplary patience. Rosamond looked on, beaming.

'Willie has been such a good boy to-day,' she said. 'He is at the top of his class; and Anson has good marks too.'

'There, that will do,' said John, after a nod of pleasure at each praiseworthy little boy. 'Papa is tired.'

'Are you, John? O then don't let the children trouble you. Connie will take them all away.'

Sweet-faced Connie seemed to have her troop of small brothers under absolute control. She marshalled them out of the room like a little school-mistress, without a protest on their part. Rosamond was plainly a good disciplinarian.

John threw himself into the easy-chair, with the relaxed look of a man who has been on the stretch.

'Whom do you think I have seen, Rose?'

'Whom do you think I have heard from?'

'Who?'

'Muriel.'

John's start was something unwonted.

'You don't mean to say she has had leave!'

'I suppose so. She writes her letter, not knowing in the least, she says, whether she will be allowed to send it off. By its coming I can only imagine that she was allowed. John, there is sad news from India. The twins are gone.'

'The twins!'

'Yes—cholera, and very sudden. Poor Sibyl! O I am so grieved.'

'I saw something had been distressing you.'

'I don't know how they will bear such a loss. It is just heart-breaking. But read the letter.'

John pored over it silently for some minutes, meditating by the way.

'I have been wondering whether to answer her,' said Rosamond.

'Answer her, by all means; only don't say anything that you would object to having made public. Whether your letter will be allowed to reach Muriel is doubtful, but you can make the attempt.'

'If I didn't dislike the feeling of it, I would disguise my writing in the address.'

'No, no—have all open and above-board,' said John, as Muriel would have said in his place.

'I know it won't do—but the poor girl does long so to see something of us.'

'This loss, as she says, will probably bring Chesney and Sibyl home, Rose.'

For Major Chesney Rivers, youngest son of the old gentleman of the Manor, was only some six or seven years older than John Rivers, grandson and rightful heir of the same. And the two having been together as brothers under one roof, from John's babyhood, the position of each as uncle and nephew had scarcely been recognised. John seemed to stand half-way between the two generations. Chesney Rivers at this date was in the prime of life, not more than seven or eight and thirty. Had John's father lived, he would have reached the age of fifty-five. Constance Irwin, the disowned elder daughter, followed near him, being ten years older than Mrs. Bertram.

So it came to pass that John's feeling about Chesney Rivers was more that of a brother than a nephew. The fact of Chesney having married one younger than his own wife, and one who was likewise as her sister, tended to strengthen this state of affairs.

'Do you think their coming will make any difference to us?' asked Rosamond.

'As to my grandfather? That is the question! Not likely, I am afraid.'

'If any one can do anything Chesney can.'

John smiled rather sadly. 'If any one could do anything, John Rivers could. That would once have been said. I confess my fear is that Chesney may rather get himself into difficulties on our account.'

'I have never told Sibyl exactly how things are,' said Rosamond wistfully. 'It would have been a comfort, John,

—but you wished me not. And Muriel seems not to have spoken out either. Their sending a message through her proves that they can't understand what separation it is.'

'No. If they come home they will soon find out.'

'But what will they think? What will they do? Sibyl not to come and see me! Why, it is impossible. John, what a miserable thing an uncontrolled temper is!'

'My dear, don't you spoil any of your boys. That lies at the bottom of it. He never had his will crossed in childhood.'

'Then his mother was downright cruel. Why, he makes for himself more trouble and heartache than half-a-dozen other people's troubles put together,' said Rosamond. 'I can't think how he bears it all, for my part.'

'Don't you care to know whom I have seen?' asked John.

'O yes—I am forgetting. I meant to find out. Who is it? Mr. Berridge? Mr. Tottridge?'

'My grandfather.'

'Why, John! Why didn't you tell me before? How did he look? You haven't spoken with him!'

'Yes. He was out with Lilias—driving furiously as usual—and the horse came to grief in a hedge. I don't precisely know how it happened. Lily was not hurt, but she looked very white. The horse was limping, and the traces were broken, and the foot-board was smashed. I stopped to offer my services, and Lily told me that this was the third upset within twelve months, but she seemed almost afraid to look at me.'

'And grandfather?'

'He gave me as distinct a cold shoulder as one man ever had from another.'

'Would he not let you help him?'

'He said, "No, I thank you." I said, "Lilias looks pale, and the Rectory is nearer than the Manor. May she not come and rest?"'

'And he——'

'Said—"I thank you, NO!"—with sufficient emphasis.'

'And you?' Rosamond asked breathlessly.

'I made another attempt, spoke just as I used to do, and said, "Grandfather, we might splice this up easily enough. I have not quite forgotten how to do a bit of carpentering. Do you remember what a good hand I was once?" He came a step nearer, holding himself like a ramrod, looked me straight in the face, and said angrily, "Will—you—go, if you please?" "Then I can be of no use?" I said. "None," he answered curtly. So I walked on, and sent a man to them.'

Then there was a silence. Rosamond stood gazing into the fire, with her eyes full. When she glanced up, John had his face buried in his hands.

'O John, don't!' she said, but he did not move.

Rosamond came close, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

'You don't mind so very much, do you? It is nothing new.'

He gave her no answer. Even Rosamond had scarcely realized till that moment the closeness of the tie between grandfather and grandson.

'Some day things will be set right. Don't you believe they will? I do. He must forgive you sooner or later. It isn't as if he had any real reason.'

'More hopeful, if he had,' muttered John huskily. 'He would not then have to confess himself in the wrong, and the yielding might come from me.'

'But you won't let it distress you. He was not likely to give way at the moment of meeting you. It seems to me that Muriel's letter being allowed to come is a good sign. Doesn't it to you?'

'I don't know. I saw no good signs to-day.'

'I didn't know you cared so very much. At least, I mean, one gets used to the state of things,' said Rosamond, as he leant back, looking depressed.

'Seeing him brought back old days. Well—no use to moan over spilt milk,' said John, with a deep sigh. 'Only he is growing old.'

'He is old.'

'Aye—seventy-five. How many more years of life are likely? I don't think I could stand his being taken—without one kind word to me.'

John started up and went to the window. Rosamond good little wife that she was, held quietly aloof, and presently he came back.

'Well—it is God's will,' he said. 'I believe our prayers will be heard—whether through Chesney's influence, or any other means. It does not matter how. Somehow, we shall be heard.'

And the door opened.

'Mr. Ray, ma'am,' said the servant.

CHAPTER X.

THE STATE OF AFFAIRS.

'RAY! No!' exclaimed John.

'Why, Cramer!' said Rosamond in amazement.

'You didn't expect to see me here, of course.'

'About as much as the man in the moon. Sit down, and account to us for your appearance. Rose and I are very glad to see you.'

'You have not been near this place for years,' observed Rosamond.

'Eight years,' said Cramer.

He sat down in a despondent attitude, putting his hat upon the tiger's head, and hanging his own somewhat. Rosamond thought he looked like a man fresh from a rebuff.

'Where are you staying?' she asked. 'Not at the inn, I hope. Can't you sleep with us?'

'Thanks—no. I am at Copenhagen Villa.'

'The Tea-caddy?'

'Well, yes—some old acquaintances of mine have come there. The Rokebys.'

'I don't think I have heard them spoken of. Why didn't you come to us?'

'I don't know. The coming at all was a sudden notion. Mrs. Rokeby had sent a message of general invitation, and I felt inclined to see Claverton again.'

'And are you staying long?'

'I have just made up my mind—pretty nearly—to go back to-morrow.'

'So soon?'

'Well, yes. No good in staying longer.'

'That speaks ill for Claverton attractions,' said John, and he fidgeted.

'London attractions may be the stronger.'

John and Rosamond exchanged stealthy glances.

'What a shame this is about the old gentleman!' exclaimed Cramer suddenly. 'Scandalous! You of all people!'

'Who told you?' asked John.

'Everybody seems to know it—here, I mean. The news never reached me before. I could hardly believe my ears. You don't say he really will not speak to you?'

'Not precisely. He spoke to me this afternoon.'

'He did!'

'Yes. There was a slight accident, and I offered my services.'

'Did he accept them?'

'No.'

'He does not speak to John willingly, at any rate,' said Rosamond. 'It has been all along a very painful business.'

'Painful! Why, John and he were inseparables. I shall never believe in human love again,' said Cramer Ray, with a bitterness hardly to be accounted for by the matter in hand.

'Don't,' said John quietly. '"Put not your trust in any child of man;" but "trust ye in the Lord for ever."'

Cramer's face showed no response.

'That used not to be your style,' he said.

'No. It used not.'

'Well—you have reason to quote that particular text, if any one has. I suppose there was a time when you did put trust in *him*. And you two used to get on wonderfully together—though most people don't find him attractive.'

'He was as a father to me, till——'

'Till when?'

'Till difficulties began. But I can never forget all the kindness that went before.'

'A good many people would lose sight of it in the unkindness since.'

'Impossible.'

'May be so to you. It would not be to everybody.'

'I know how he must be suffering.'

'If so, he brings it on himself,' said Cramer.

'Our self-brought troubles are usually our worst.'

'I believe you there,' said Cramer abruptly. 'It is a self-brought trouble my being here at all. I wish I had had more sense.'

'Why?'

'Never mind.'

'Cramer, have you seen my grandfather or Muriel?' asked Rosamond.

'Mr. Rivers! He would as soon speak to a dog as to me—a good deal sooner, probably. I am too sweet for him,' added the young man, with a laugh, not quite pleasant in tone. 'He doesn't approve of sugar—except in his tea. I am not many degrees removed from a grocer, in his ideas. And Mrs. Bertram holds with him. She is as proud as an empress.'

'Have you seen any of them?'

'I saw Muriel—for a minute. And I saw where I stood too.'

Rosamond would have said an encouraging word, but she read caution in John's face.

'Muriel is very much admired out of her own home,' observed John.

'I should suppose she was aware of that fact.'

'Hardly in human nature not to be,' said John. 'But I never knew a beautiful woman more free from petty vanity.'

'Any way she is out of my reach,' said Craven moodily.

Neither spoke. John's look restrained Rose.

'Easy to see that you think the same,' added Cramer.

'Did you come to ask that question?' asked John.

Well, I suppose I did. Do you suppose there is a grain of hope for me?'

John was sorry for him, and sorry for the answer which he felt himself impelled to give. He spoke gently: 'I can say nothing as to Muriel herself. She was very young in those days. I am afraid you have no good look-out as concerns my grandfather and aunt.'

'I'll go back to London, and do my best to forget the past—smother it in sugar!' said Cramer, harping uncomfortably on the subject of his business. 'Only, sugar preserves things. I don't want those feelings preserved. Can't think why on earth I came down here, to have them revived. I am not a man of impulse generally.'

'Were they dead before?' asked Rosamond, with the least possible curl of her lip.

'I thought so—nearly.'

'O well, then they will soon die again.'

Cramer did not quite like that. He glanced suspiciously from one to the other, but John's face was partly shaded.

'What brought on the split between you and Mr. Rivers?' he asked, dropping his own affairs.

'Different difficulties,' said John. 'He and you might possibly agree in condemning certain lines of action, to which I felt myself bound.'

'He used to class you as a clergyman of the right sort—no cant about you.'

'Just so,' said John, with calmness. 'It was quite a business transaction in those days. Being called in to dying folks was slightly embarrassing, but it was not difficult to make light work of parish calls generally. Plenty of time over, for gaiety.'

'And now?' Cramer spoke curiously.

'Now I know the solemn responsibility of my trust. But—*This* is happiness,' said John.

'Well—I don't wonder so much now at your getting into a scrape with the old gentleman.'

'It was Muriel's affair which brought things to a climax,'

said Rosamond. 'John managed to keep matters pretty smooth till then.'

'What affair?'

'Sir Timothy Northbrook proposed for her,' said Rose. 'Grandfather urged it on, and aunt Mary would scarcely hear of a refusal. Muriel was in despair, for he is very ugly, and quite old, and a man with scarcely two thoughts in his brain. He has title and wealth, and that was all they cared for. I suspect they wanted to get Muriel off their hands, in a respectable manner. John, am I very naughty to say that? Isn't it true?'

'Shameful,' muttered Cramer.

'It almost seemed as if she were to be forced into the marriage, in spite of all her determination. So John came forward, and threw himself into the breach. He defended Muriel to my grandfather, and he spoke out so plainly to Sir Timothy about Muriel's real feelings, that Sir Timothy drew back at once. I don't know what else could have stopped it. Muriel can be very resolute, but even she was frightened at my grandfather's anger. John bore all the brunt of it, and sheltered her, but that finished off our intercourse with anybody at the Manor. We haven't been under its roof since.'

Cramer was silent for a minute.

'But after all that was not the only cause of your split,' he remarked.

'That was merely the occasion,' said John. 'The cause lay deeper.'

'John had steered clear of a good many rocks before—not over easily,' said Rosamond, with a little shake of her head. 'Opposition came to be a duty that time. I think Muriel would soon have been in a brain fever, if he had not acted as he did.'

'Poor girl!' muttered Cramer.

'Sir Timothy said at once that he could not think of pressing his suit. I suppose he was rather thick-skinned,

and had not thought much of her cold manner. John was pleased with the way he took it, but I believe there were high words between him and my grandfather.'

John was looking thoughtfully into the fire. 'There was another difficulty,' he said. 'Sir Timothy is a man of the world, and Muriel lives for God. How could the two walk together?'

'Muriel never was narrow-minded,' said Cramer uneasily.

'Never. She is too large-hearted for that. But it is common sense, not narrowness, to see that two people tied together, and pulling opposite ways, can't be happy.'

'They need not pull.'

'Some have tried that plan,' said John. 'I hope Muriel never may.'

'Why?'

'Simply this. She pulls heavenward. Sir Timothy, or any other like-minded, pulls earthward. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" But if, to bring about agreement, she leaves off pulling, then she too sinks earthward, and heavenly hope and joy die out.'

'How if she makes the other rise with her?' asked Cramer, with a curious expression.

John drew a short breath. 'Ah—that has been tried too. If you asked Muriel, she would tell you that the soaring heavenward is hard enough already. Earth-attraction pulls sufficiently at any time. If she adds a heavy burden to her own weight, and then tries to soar, the fear is that she will be overcome and drop earthward altogether. I am putting before you the common-sense and reasonable view of the question.'

'I don't see it all of course as you do. But it is easy to understand why you don't encourage me to think of Muriel,' said Cramer. 'If these are her notions too, it isn't much use. I am as good a fellow as most, but I don't profess any extraordinary virtues.'

'Don't you? I do,' said John.

'You! O of course,' said Cramer, with a touch of cynical in his tone.

'Why should not you profess the same?' asked J gravely. '"He hath covered me with the robe of righte ness." Why not you too? "This is the Name whe He shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." " yet not I," you see. Mine—yet not mine. "I will n mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only."'

'O of course—yes,' said Cramer, getting up. 'You s quite an adept now at religious doctrines. If you see Mu you can tell her that I am not fit for her any longer. In t you can congratulate her on a happy escape. I don't k what she thinks, but you can easily bring her round to y opinion.'

'Don't you know Muriel better than that? Sit dc Ray; you are not going yet?'

'Yes, I am. I have things to do.'

'Can't you come here for a week?'

'N—o, I think not—thanks. You are all too good me. Besides, I had better be off.'

John really thought so too, and did not press the pc Cramer had to sit down again, however, for another c and a cup of tea. He steered studiously clear of ve questions, and held to his purpose of returning home day. They managed to send him away in a more che mood.

'But, John, I should not like him for Muriel,' said R mond, after his departure. 'I wish he would keep a and get her out of his head. I am almost sorry now th told him so many particulars. It could do no good.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE LETTER THAT CAME.

NOBODY saw much of Mr. Rivers that evening. He chose to sit gloomily apart in his study—sure sign with him of a disturbed mind. Lilias was poorly from the effects of her fright, and Mrs. Bertram waited upon her with a dignified species of motherly anxiety. She swept about gracefully, and was never hurried, but had eyes and ears for nobody else.

What Mr. Rivers did with himself could only be conjectured. Arthur being once sent on an errand to the study, was questioned on his return, and briefly replied that 'Grandpapa seemed bothered.'

'Where was he sitting?'

'In his arm-chair.'

'What was he doing?'

'Nothing.'

'Not reading?'

'Nothing.'

'What had he said?'

'Almost nothing.'

Arthur seemed disposed to do the same, and escaped. Later, he confided to Muriel that he had walked in by mistake, thinking a voice answered, and had found Mr. Rivers with his head down on the table, and a white handkerchief spread over it.

'And, Muriel, when he started up, you don't know how wretched he looked.'

'*Poor grandfather.*'

'I couldn't tell you!' said the boy. 'It was that sort of hungry gnawing look that one sees sometimes in a poor half-starved person. He looked just miserable. I thought he would be furious at my mistake, but he only said, "Be off!" So I put down the parcel, and made myself scarce in a hurry.'

'I believe he longs for John every day of his life,' said Muriel.

'Then why doesn't he send for him?'

'He would be vexed at things John does, and he prides himself on never changing.'

'It's the stupidest thing a man can ever pride himself on,' said Arthur indignantly. 'It is either making out oneself a pope, and infallible, or else declaring that one will never be wiser than to-day. No sense in it either way. I believe nine people in ten count themselves popes, without knowing it.'

After which Arthur drew in his horns, not being wont to let out so much. Muriel wished sometimes that he would be more open with her, but she did not take much pains to bring about that end.

At breakfast next morning the post came in as usual bringing, for a wonder, only a single letter, that being addressed to Muriel. Letters were always handed on a salver to the old gentleman. Muriel saw his moustaches curl, as if on receipt of an excitement-telegram from his brain.

'I am not going to have this sort of thing!'

'What sort?' asked Mrs. Bertram.

'Letters from that house. Do you hear, Muriel? I won't have it. So there.'

'Grandpapa, I did not ask for any answer,' said Muriel.

'Asked or no, it has come. I tell you I won't have any more of this.'

He had the letter in his hand, which shook visibly. 'Is it from Rose to me?' asked Muriel, with a half-unconscious stress on the last word.

'It is from Rosamond Rivers to nobody. She has the *right to address* no member of my household.'

'There may be some message to Sibyl in it,' said Mrs. Bertram in a careless tone, secretly afraid of something unpleasant, for Muriel looked very white and rigid.

'I don't care. Sibyl or no Sibyl, it shall go behind the fire.'

'I should like to see it first, if you please,' said Muriel, in a constrained voice.

'You would like—you——'

'Yes, if you please.'

A word more would have undone the effect. Mr. Rivers frowned sternly at her.

'Very well. Take your choice. Either I put the letter behind the fire, or you read it aloud to me in my study.'

'I will read it aloud.'

'Come, then.'

Mr. Rivers went off with a jerk, and Muriel followed. She was used to the peremptory tone, and only trembled at possible utterances in the letter. Yet she trusted to John's prudence.

'Now!' said Mr. Rivers. 'Mind—no omissions or alterations.'

And Muriel began:

'"My own darling Muriel——"'

'Fudge,' said Mr. Rivers.

'"Your letter made me very unhappy this morning, for our poor Sibyl, and Chesney too. O it does seem sad, but God knows best, and some day we shall see the why."'

'Go on. It is not worth dawdling over,' said Mr. Rivers.

'"John and I think with you that it will bring them home before long. India will indeed seem dreary to them after this. I don't know whether grandfather will like me to write to you——"'

'Don't know indeed!' said Mr. Rivers in a subterranean growl.

'"But I can't resist sending a few words. We often think about you all, and John never prays without bringing in *your name and grandfather's.*"'

'Much obliged,' said Mr. Rivers; but the working of features was not all scornful.

'"If things were but different! O we do so long for th John saw grandfather yesterday, and when he came ho he was quite upset, and sat with his face hidden, hardly a to speak. You know it takes a good deal to overcome Jo but he never can shake off the old clinging to poor gra father, and anything to do with old days has such po over him."'

This part of the letter was received in dead silence. Mu found her task a nervous one. She stopped to clear l throat, and Mr. Rivers said stiffly, 'Make haste, if you plea

'"But we do hope that some day all will come right. T children are well, and often talk of 'dear Cousin Muriel' Connie especially. John will write a postscript, so I m stop. Believe me, dearest, ever your own loving cousin

'"ROSIE."

'Enough, in all conscience,' said Mr. Rivers. 'Wh does that fellow say next?'

Muriel had glanced on slightly. 'Grandpapa, you w not enjoy hearing it.'

'Finish,' said Mr. Rivers conclusively, and Muriel had obey.

'"Just a few words, dear Muriel. We are writing to Sib and will not send messages by you. Do not talk ag about 'not rejoicing.' There can be no music if the he is not in tune."'

'Hey?' said Mr. Rivers.

'Grandpapa, I only said something about the difficult feeling happy, as things are now,' said Muriel, with droop head.

'Get on. I suppose he has sent a sermon.'

'"Remember those words, 'Rejoice always,' and try live in their spirit. So you have not found your key-note ye

'*Hey?*' repeated Mr. Rivers.

'It was only an idea of ours, about every one having to play a tune in life.'

'Very childish idea,' said Mr. Rivers, who was like a good many other people in condemning always what he did not understand.

'"You have not found your key-note yet. I thought of you a day or two ago, when I came across these words." —Shall I read them, grandpapa? Only a quotation about music?'

'Go on.'

Muriel obeyed at once.

'"'Before a tune can be created, a certain sound, whether high or low in pitch, must be chosen, and fixed as the key-note (governing note) of the coming tune. Immediately, according to those laws of nature by which God has tuned our ears and souls, six other notes spring forth at measured distances from the key-note, claiming the sole right of attendance upon it.'

'"You know this well enough, but it is a good clear statement. Now you have to find your key-note. I thought of the word 'Love' for you, and then there flashed into my mind the graces of the Spirit following—'joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.' There are the seven. Perhaps in spiritual things we may say there are nine, and add the two last—'meekness, temperance.' What a key-board you will have! Sweet and holy sounds may be looked for from such a group—love to God and man your governing note, and each of the others falling into its right place. Take care that the note 'joy' is very often sounded in your tune. This is a long postscript, but I have not often the opportunity of giving you a thought.

'"Believe me, your affectionate Brother,

'"JOHN RIVERS."'

'Brother! No,' said Mr. Rivers harshly. 'Well, that is a good *thing over. A farrago of nonsense.*'

To Muriel it seemed that the harshness was somew forced. If there were any softening, however, it proved be of short duration. She went away quietly, not a li surprised at being allowed to keep her letter. But w again she saw Mr. Rivers, he said in his most severe man

'Mind—the next letter that comes goes behind the unopened.'

And Muriel knew that he meant it.

CHAPTER XII.

SOTTO VOCE.

Snow in May. That was something unusual. The weather changed suddenly one afternoon, a bitter north wind coming on, and presently large feathery flakes dropped earthwards. The wind had lulled somewhat before then, but now and then a gust swept them up again towards the tree-tops, or a small whirlwind set them rushing in tiny circles.

Lilacs were out in bloom, and may-trees showed signs of following suit. They bowed their heads before the storm, very much surprised, one would think, at the prospect of such an unwonted ermine mantle, and somewhat in danger also of a frost-nip.

Mrs. Bertram and her daughters were going out to a party that evening—not a large, but a select one. There were not many houses within reach counted worthy of this honour. Also there were not many houses where Mr. Rivers could rejoice in the certainty of not meeting his grandson. John Rivers was a favourite, and had many friends. Mr. Rivers' rules on this head were stringent.

Mr. Rivers, being troubled with a gouty fit, had declined the invitation for himself, and Montgomery Maxwell was to take his vacated seat in the carriage. Mrs. Bertram's offer of the same ranked as a cruel kindness. An evening party was to Mr. Maxwell the horror of horrors. He could no longer plead his knee as an excuse, and all faltering objections were overborne. Mrs. Haye, the hostess, a superior person herself, *had a high esteem* for the humble-minded *tutor, and would in nowise take* a refusal.

So the three ladies stood waiting in the drawing-room for the arrival of Mr. Maxwell. He had utterly scouted the notion of being called for by the carriage.

'But I wish now that I had insisted,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'He will inevitably be late.'

She stood in her dignified fair beauty, every touch of rich silk and antique lace and snowy swansdown being carefully designed to set off form and colouring. The chief business of her life was to adorn this handsome body of hers—the sheath of a very puny blunt and untempered sword.

Her slender hands were playing lightly with her fan, and her blue eyes glanced from one to the other of her daughters. Lilias was in white silk and blue, and every inch of her attire had passed under review of her mother's eyes; whereas Muriel might do the best she could for herself, and come in for criticisms afterwards. Her black net and cerise ribbons could stand criticism. Lilias looked like a snow-wreath, too colourlessly fair, in contrast with Muriel's dark warm colouring. The expression of Mrs. Bertram's eyes, travelling from one to the other, changed singularly.

'One would positively think Muriel almost older than me,' she said.

'Mamma, you told me I had better wear black.'

'Nothing else suits you. Now Lilian can wear anything.'

'Except this colour,' said Muriel.

'She can wear pink. Lily darling, you should have given way about that. I told you pink would be better. Blue makes you look paler.'

'It would not have done with Muriel's cerise.'

'Now, Lilias, you never told me you had a wish that way. As if I cared!' said Muriel.

'It does not matter,' said Lilias languidly. 'What can Mr. Maxwell be after?'

'He must have forgotten all about the evening,' remarked Muriel. 'We shall have to send a messenger. If we drive *there for him*, we shall miss him to a certainty. He will

have started by the short cut, and if he can possibly avoid being found he will. He would have no objection whatever to such an ending of our plan.'

A half-affected yet real look of worried annoyance, almost of suffering, crossed Mrs. Bertram's face. 'Muriel, I do beg of you not to use your hands in that style when you talk. You have no idea how it tries me.'

'What style, mamma?' For though the complaint was an old one, it had not been uttered of late, and she asked the question involuntarily.

'You know perfectly well. As you were doing just now. I thought you were cured of that trick long ago. It makes me creep all over.'

Muriel could not imagine why. She was given to using her hands a good deal, when under excitement, to bear out her words; and she had never found out what there was in her particular method which so irritated her mother. Mrs. Bertram looked fretted beyond endurance, and a restless shadow settled down upon her white brow. There were others who had implied to Muriel that this manner of using her hands had something uncommon and attractive about it. Ungraceful she never was, and she could not help knowing the fact.

Muriel's fingers clasped her fan tightly, and the pretty ivory thing snapped under the pressure.

'There!' Lilias said. 'What a pity! Your things always break.'

'I must take my old one to-night. It can't be helped.'

She ran upstairs lightly, for this was one of her buoyant days. Not on account of any particular reason. The day before she had been dull and depressed, just as much without reason. She was greatly given to such alternating moods.

Coming downstairs, and singing softly by the way, with her silk and net rustling after her, she nearly stumbled against Montgomery Maxwell. He clutched at her hand nervously, drops *breaking out on his forehead.*

'Muriel—Muriel—wait one moment——'

'O how do you do, Mr. Maxwell? They are in the drawing-room.'

'Stop—pray stop a moment!—Muriel, I entreat——'

He looked like a man shivering in the prospect of a cold plunge. Muriel understood, but she only asked calmly:

'Is anything wrong?'

'No, no—no, indeed—no,' said the tutor dreamily. 'Only—I had to come—having given my word—but do you think—do you think I should be missed? I have made up my mind not to go to-night. Please explain to your mother. I won't see her—and you know I shall not be missed.'

'Indeed, but you will,' said Muriel merrily. 'O you are booked, Mr. Maxwell. You can't get off. An engagement is an engagement. I'll tell mamma you have come.'

And she opened the drawing-room door, keeping her eyes fixed upon him lest he should seize the opportunity for flight. The two ladies came sweeping out immediately, and he had to hand them into the carriage through falling snow. Like many nervous people, as soon as he found the thing inevitable he resigned himself to it with wise philosophy, and struggled no more.

They were shown into a drawing-room of luxurious prettiness. Velvet-piled carpet and velvet chairs, pier-glasses and handsome pictures, contributed to the effect. In the centre a grand pyramid of ferns and foreign plants rose high. Mr. Maxwell was likely to suffer distraction all the evening, between his hankering after retired corners and his devotion to the vegetable kingdom. The first attraction prevailed. He shook hands with the lady of the house, slipped back adroitly, as her attention was diverted by another arrival, and vanished. Some time later Mrs. Haye discovered the top of his brown head, in the corner behind the grand piano.

It was thorns to Mrs. Bertram to see the position which Muriel naturally took in society, strange as such a feeling

ıay seem. There were those who admired Lilias, not few n number, but this night she was more than usually im-assive—positively dull, indeed—and those who had collected round her gradually dropped off. Many of them joined the group where Muriel sat. Her brilliant animation and rapid expression of thought were strongly attractive. This power was in danger of becoming a snare to her, leading her, as it often did, to say and do things which she afterwards deeply regretted. It is difficult under excitement, and in the full flow of talk, to keep strict guard. Muriel's colours—the colours of her King—were at times hidden altogether, and she would remember afterwards, with keen pain, how she had vied with the gayest, and had shone for herself alone. It did not so often strike her at the time.

This evening, happening to glance round, she saw Lilias looking rather neglected, and the idea flashed up that she might draw her sister into her circle. Muriel's will rebelled strongly. She did not know what Lilias might say. She never could talk freely before her. Lily was so critical and cold.

But conscience did not feel easy, and the zest of the conversation was gone. While still debating with herself, Mrs. Haye came begging her for some music, and Muriel went to the piano.

She was in a mood to do her best this night—not the less so for Mr. Maxwell's presence. He would appreciate, she knew, where others would only dutifully applaud. Conversation dropped low as she went on, only a few voices keeping it up here and there in subdued tones. But Muriel always heard with peculiar keenness while playing, and thereby many a complimentary remark came to her ears, certainly not uttered with that intention. She had not advanced beyond the third movement of her lengthy sonata,—played all from memory,—when her attention was caught by certain words uttered near at hand. Though

almost whispered, they seemed to stand out from all oth sounds.

'Decidedly oriental—so very unlike her sister. We use to think she must be a daughter by a former marriage, b she is Mrs. Bertram's own child.'

'I wonder she is not married yet.'

'She might have been, years ago, if her grandfather we less of an old tyrant. There is a Mr. Ray who set his hea on her, when she was hardly out of the schoolroom. B the moment Mr. Rivers found that he was in business h cut short the whole affair, and sent the young man off a fast as possible. That was years ago; but quite lately h came down here, to see whether he had any chance. An finding things as hopeless as ever, he just gave up, we back to London, and engaged himself the very next day t a little cousin of mine. She is a good little creature, an has been living a long while in uncertainty—and I am gla for her sake; but how he can put up with her in exchang for Miss Bertram, I can't imagine. I dare say they will b happy, though. And after all Mr. Ray himself can't boa any particular allowance of brains, and he really is not equa to Miss Bertram.'

Muriel had gone on like a machine, feeling all colou leave her cheeks, and a cold damp spring up on face an hands. Suddenly she found that she did not know wha part of her piece she was playing, and the next variatio had fled from her memory. Muriel was up to the occasio A few quiet chords gave her time to recollect herself, an landed her in a new piece. Very few in the room detecte the change, and the two voices did not pause.

'That is her sister near here—the delicate-looking girl i white. Pretty, is she not? Father believes she will not li long. He says she is decidedly consumptive.'

Muriel broke down altogether, apologized, went on an brok e down afresh.

'*Why, Muriel!*' said the surprised voice of Mr. Maxwell

'I can't help it. My hands are not obedient to-night,' she said, rising.

'Cold are they—or trembling? You are not given to be nervous,' he said.

'No, not generally. Mrs. Haye,' she said, as that lady came up, 'you see I have made a mess of it. Some one else will have to take my place.'

'But I hope you will take it again presently. I have quite counted on your playing, I assure you. I dare say you are tired now, and ought to have an ice. O here is Mr. Maxwell. Perhaps he will kindly get you one.'

For nothing else would Mr. Maxwell have been willing to leave his corner. He proposed that they should seek the cooler air of the hall, and Muriel complied, in nowise loth. Anything to be screened from observation. A few people sat about here in twos and threes, enjoying comparative quiet. Muriel subsided into a wicker chair, beside a huge sheltering pot, from which sprouted a gigantic foreign grass. Mr. Maxwell took to examining the latter, while she slowly disposed of her ice. Presently he asked,—

'No news from India by this mail, I suppose?'

She looked up vacantly. 'News from India—O no. I mean, no letter has come.'

'I think the mail must be in. Are you unwell to-night, Muriel?'

'Perfectly well. Why should you think such a thing?'

'Are you coming to see my mother to-morrow?'

'To-morrow?'

'That is your usual day, is it not?'

'Usual day? O yes.'

Montgomery stood looking down, with a concerned expression.

'Then I may tell my mother to expect you if the day is fine. She looks forward much to your visits.'

Muriel woke up after a pause.

'I *beg your pardon; I did* not hear. Mr. Maxwell,

don't say a word to mamma, but do you think Lilias very delicate?'

'Every one thinks so,' was the guarded answer.

'Not seriously?'

'I hope not, indeed. I trust not. She does not look well to-night, however. Did that put it into your head?'

'Never mind. Something did, of course. Papa died of consumption. I want your honest opinion—does Lilias take after him?'

'She has his constitution, no doubt—his weakness of chest. But symptoms are wanting—happily wanting. Her cough has a suspicious sound.'

'That mere little hack of hers. I thought it was a trick.'

'Ah, if you had watched that cough in others, as I have! Poor Lilias! But I don't see the inevitable hectic flush. She may grow out of the tendency. Youth is on her side.'

She might—but how if she did not?

'I never thought of such a thing as possible,' said Muriel mournfully.

'And she is your only sister; but don't despond. These things are often feared, and don't come to pass.'

'I have two other sisters—Lilias has been least to me of all,' Muriel said low. 'That would make anything of this sort worse.'

'Cannot you bring about a change?'

'I don't know how. It is not easy.'

She sat with her head bent, keeping silence.

'Do you remember those words of Mr. Rivers' that you quoted to me one day, Muriel?'

'Words quoted?'

'About my thinking what I liked, and no one the wiser.'

'Yes. O it was rather presumptuous, and not kind of me.'

'I think you were very kind. But you have exercised me a good deal in mind. What ought I to do as *a first step?*'

Muriel looked deprecating.

'Indeed I cannot advise you,' she said. 'You must judge for yourself.'

'Shall I go and tell Mr. Rivers that I have been a coward, and betrayed my colours?'

'I don't think you have—only hidden them a little. If you do that, you go, Mr. Maxwell.'

'I know. Perhaps I deserve it. Indeed I am sure I do.'

'But you are not sure that Arthur and I deserve to lose you,' said Muriel, smiling sadly. 'Somebody has said that though we are bound to let our lamps burn brightly, yet we are not bound to thrust them in other people's faces.'

'True—true;' and Mr. Maxwell seemed impressed. 'But then, am I to go on as I have done?'

'I should think there would be opportunities enough for confessing Christ. I know it by the number I miss.'

'Just so. But then I do not speak in society—unnecessarily.'

'This might prove to be necessary once in a way.'

Montgomery pondered the matter deeply, and Muriel pondered him for a few minutes. A man of his intellectual grasp coming to her for advice seemed to her strange indeed. Presently she found her way back into the drawing-room, to look at Lilias. The other piece of information which she had heard stated she thrust resolutely for the present out of the region of thought. Out of the region of feeling she could not put it.

Lilias was pale, and had a spiritless air. Muriel noted so much, and went to her side.

'Lilias, don't you feel well?'

'What do you mean?'

'You look so tired. If you would rather go home early, we could easily manage it.'

'No, thank you. I would not have mamma alarmed on any account. Pray don't let her see us talking, or she will think *something is wrong with* me.

Lilias spoke in the cold manner, established long a habit between the sisters.

Muriel moved away, to meet with a fresh appeal music. She played well this time — played with passionate thrill and self-abandon which sometimes spr from a heart stirred and aching to its depths. There w moist eyes in the room among her listeners.

CHAPTER XIII.

SISTERS.

Coming out from the gas-heated drawing-room, the cold air struck keen. Lilias shivered, and had a blue look, as she stepped from the carriage at the Manor door, with nothing on her head, and only a short loose cloak over her shoulders. Snow was falling still.

It fell a good part of the night, and the world looked wintry in the morning. Lilacs bent their pretty heads beneath an embarrassing mantle, and young green leaves peeped out in strange contrast with the snow which loaded every bush.

That could not last. The wind swept round to the south, and before midday the sun shone out from an azure sky. Thereupon began the white robe speedily to weep itself away. Little streams trickled in all directions, and each twig had its droppings, while the roads soon lay deep under a slushy compound. Spring came back in full force that afternoon.

But the change was some hours too late for Lilias. She had taken a severe chill, and for the next two weeks lived a purely invalid existence. Muriel was anxious at heart, and longed to break through the ice-barrier which divided her sister from herself. Lilias' manner never thawed. Possibly Muriel's efforts to show her kindness were not even remarked. Also Mrs. Bertram rarely left Lilias, night or day, and when she was near Muriel did not venture to intrude. There was a touch of jealousy in Mrs. Bertram's engrossing love for this younger child.

In the other matter, concerning Cramer Ray, Muriel went through a good many tossings. She strove to put it aside, as a thing done with, yet he was never out of her mind. She felt by no means sure in her heart that he could have satisfied her present self, yet to forget him was impossible. Now she wished she had given him a word of stronger encouragement. Then she had a fit of indignant contempt for his fickleness, which of course helped her greatly. There were times when she disbelieved the whole tale. There were other times when she believed, and was almost thankful, feeling that it might indeed be for the best. There were yet again times when her loss came over her, with a power equally heart-breaking, whether its source were real or partly imaginary, and she sobbed or paced her room by the hour together. Altogether, though few could have guessed it, Muriel suffered a good deal.

The Rokebys made no mention of their late visitor. Before Muriel's next visit Claverton gossip had informed them as to the state of affairs, and they carefully avoided all allusion to him in her presence. Muriel heard the fact of his having stayed at the Cottage, and sometimes wondered whether they could have confirmed or denied the tale she had heard. Ask, she could not, however.

Something bright came one day in the shape of a letter from Chesney Rivers, telling of his proposed speedy return to England, with his wife. Even Lilias brightened up, and was pleased.

'Uncle Chesney does not write in depressed spirits, seemingly,' Muriel remarked.

'He was always wonderfully buoyant,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'Lily, you must get up your good looks before then.'

'I shall be well long before they come—though I don't believe Dr. Peters understands me in the least.'

'Don't you think so? He is such a clever man.'

'*If he* had any sense he might get rid of this stupid little

cough for me. Doctors never seem to hit upon just the medicines that I need.'

'Shall we have a doctor down from London?'

'O no; I shall get all right without that. Only patience is wanted.'

'Yes, you are better this afternoon, Lily.'

'I wish I felt so.'

Muriel scarcely caught the words, and Mrs. Bertram heard them not at all. A visitor having just come, she was summoned to another sitting-room. An impulse came over Muriel to turn to good account this rare opportunity. She was seldom alone with Lilias. Leaning over the sofa-back she said gently,—

'Don't you feel so well to-day, Lily?'

'Why? What do you mean?' asked Lilias stiffly.

'I heard what you said just now.'

'It was not meant for you.'

'Would you not care for me to read to you sometimes?'

'No, thanks. Mamma does it.'

Muriel was tempted to give up. She began arranging the coverlet over her sister's feet.

'Don't move that, please. Mamma always puts it right.'

Thoroughly checked, Muriel moved away. She stood looking sorrowfully into the fire, thinking how hard this was to bear, when her heart was so filled with a new compassionate tenderness for poor Lilias. She scarcely knew that two or three large tears had dropped, glittering in the firelight, and soiling the bright fender. But happening to turn round, she found Lilias' eyes watching her earnestly.

'Muriel, what are you crying about?'

'Nothing. I mean, it does not signify. Only at my own thoughts, I suppose.'

'You are always thinking about Sibyl, I believe.'

'O no—I was thinking about you.'

Lilias started and whitened, and looked strangely at her sister.

'About me?' she said. 'Why in the world shoul cry about me?'

Muriel was silent, hardly knowing what to say. Sh not like to seem to accuse Lilias of unkindness. A c different sense in which Lilias might take her words, di occur to her.

'People do foolish things sometimes,' she said qu and then she stooped to give Lilias a kiss.

Lily received it passively, and said no more. Tha all that passed between them at the time. But the day Mrs. Bertram asked in a displeased tone of her daughter—,

'Muriel, have you been talking any nonsense to about her health?'

'No, mamma.'

'I think you must. Nobody else would do such a th

'I ask her how she feels sometimes.'

'That is not all. Last night she was crying quite vio in bed. She would give me no reason, except that sh tired of being so long ill, and wanted to know whe doctor said she would be well. It is only two or three w and I told her so, for I could not think what the poor d meant; but she kept saying that she had been ill much l than that, and that she knew people thought her so. I only suppose that you had been putting depressing no into her head.'

'No, indeed, mamma—certainly not, knowing it. you don't tell me much about Dr. Peters' visits, so I not tell her what he says, even if I wished.'

'Dr. Peters is always inclined to croak. I would have a London doctor to-morrow, if I did not think it make her nervous.'

'Would it not be better to risk that? Mamma, is any real anxiety?'

'Anxiety! Of course not. A mere cold, giving *steadily.* But how you can suggest such an idea, a

that cool tone too! I always knew you never did really care for your poor sister.'

Mrs. Bertram went away in tears, and Muriel began to think she had almost better never speak at all. Everything she said and did seemed to be wrong. It did not strike her that her mother's irritability perhaps arose from a smothered fear.

A day or two later Lilias said carelessly,

'Mamma, you never get your dinner in peace. Couldn't Muriel sometimes stay with me part of the time? I should be all right with her for half-an-hour, if she does not mind.'

Muriel smiled full assent.

'My dear, I don't care for anything except your comfort.'

'But Arthur says grandpapa is angry at your getting up and down so often.'

'I could have my dinner afterwards,' said Muriel.

'Muriel is no nurse,' said Mrs. Bertram, not quite pleased at the suggestion.

'I don't need nursing, and she could call you any moment. Promise me to have that one meal quietly.'

Lilias gained her way, and Muriel wondered and was glad. Had Lily any particular object in making this proposal? Muriel thought, and prayed, and waited. After three evenings of almost silent watching through her half-hour, she ventured to say,

'Lily, I sometimes fancy you would like me to read a few verses out of my pocket-Testament while I am here.'

Lilias lay silently, her white face pressed into the pillow.

'It is nice to have one or two Bible thoughts to go to sleep upon. Rose used always to do it for me that time I was ill in John's house. Should you mind?'

'No. I thought you would propose it the first night,' was the unexpected answer.

'I wish I had. It came into my head, but I suppose I was a coward,' said Muriel, studiously hiding surprise. 'Is there *any particular part you* would like?'

'Anywhere.'

Muriel chose the second chapter of Mark, a earnestly, throwing much expression into her v making no comment. At the end Lilias merely said, you,' and dropped asleep—something unusual, sinc greatly troubled with wakefulness.

From that day the reading became a regular Muriel never exceeded a short portion, and Lilias sl signs of fatigue. She listened always with the same i quietness; but one day Muriel had a glimpse of a her cheek, and when the chapter was ended, L hastily,—

'Don't tell mamma about your reading to me. no need. I should not like it to stop.'

With that Muriel was content. The little plan undiscovered for about a month, till Lilias wa recovered as to take her place once more in t circle. She looked very delicate still, but the weather suited her, and people counted her wel forward. The household mind was a good deal with the expected arrival from India.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHESNEY'S WIFE.

One brilliant June day, when the air breathed balm and sparkled with gossamer threads, the travellers came.

Chesney Rivers descended first from the carriage—a soldierly man, with frank blue eyes and resolute chin. Two sharply-defined dents, upright in his forehead, showed a touch of something like displeasure, and his greetings, though affectionate, were given with a preoccupied air.

Sibyl came next, followed by a queer little ayah, in a red and yellow sari, carrying the baby. Sibyl was twelve years younger than her husband, slight and frail, with a broad sensitive forehead, pencilled eyebrows, and a pale little face below. A sweet face it was, intellectual and full of refinement, having a luminous brightness not stamped upon but shining through each feature. Her black crape veil had fallen back, making her look paler by contrast.

It was to Muriel a strange thing to see Sibyl taking her place as Mrs. Bertram's sister. The marriage had been at the last so hasty an affair, just before Chesney's enforced return to India, and so little had been seen of bride and bridegroom after, that Muriel had as yet hardly recognised the relationship. During the first hour she had a feeling of being put at a distance from her friend, though certainly by no act of Sibyl's own, and Muriel fretted under it. She inherited a touch of her mother's jealous vein.

They sat down to late dinner before she could gain a word alone *with Sibyl. Chesney had* been chatting on various

subjects, with the dents in his brow never relaxing. In deference to his wife's wish he held in his displeasure so far, and even through the meal. But self-restraint under indignation was foreign to his frank nature, and at dessert out it all came.

'We saw John and Rosamond at the station to-day.'

Mr. Rivers' hand shook, clinking his glasses nervously. Chesney had mentioned in a letter having written to John to meet him there, and that was enough to keep away Mr. Rivers. Otherwise he had purposed going with Muriel.

'How is John?' asked Muriel.

'Anything but robust, I should have said from his look, though of course he would acknowledge to nothing. I wanted Rose to drive here with Sibyl, while John and I walked; but he says the Manor is forbidden ground to him and Rose. What on earth does it all mean?'

Dead silence. Mr. Rivers went on eating rapidly, 'each particular hair' of his face working as if it had an independent existence. Mrs. Bertram and Lilias always avoided speaking on the subject, if possible. Muriel debated what to do.

'There seems some mystery,' said Chesney, glancing from one to the other. 'What crime has John committed?'

'I have forbidden him to enter this house again, or to hold intercourse with any member of my family,' said Mr. Rivers curtly.

'Why, may I ask?'

'If you wish for particulars, any one can give them to you.'

'I do wish for them.'

But nobody spoke.

'Extraordinary! You do not really mean that John never comes here now?'

'The extraordinary thing is your not knowing it,' said Mr. Rivers sharply. 'Come here! He had better not try.'

'Poor Constance over again, I suppose,' said Chesney, his mouth taking a stern set.

'Your sister's name is not to be mentioned before me,' said Mr. Rivers fiercely.

'I assure you, father, I fully intend to see her soon in London. And any embargo as to intercourse with John and Rose will exclude Sibyl and me.'

Dead silence again. Fruit-eating went on slowly. Chesney sat with an arm thrown backwards over his chair, and a troubled look on his brow.

'John!' he said suddenly in an amazed tone. 'John! Why, I thought he was as much of a fixture here as the hills —as needful to you as food and drink.'

'You were mistaken.'

'Didn't you persuade him to take orders, and put him into that living, solely that you might have him always within reach?'

'If so, my feelings have changed.'

'If!' repeated Chesney. 'Will nobody tell me the cause of offence? Is there no hope of setting it right? Muriel——'

'No. This discussion had better be dropped,' said Mr. Rivers.

'I beg your pardon. I think I have a right to know particulars. John is more of brother than nephew to me.'

Mr. Rivers stood up, flung down the last half of his orange, and strode haughtily out of the room.

'O Chesney!' his wife said.

'You will make papa fearfully angry if you go on like that,' added his sister.

'I can't help it. You all seem cowed. What is this about John? Why have we never been told?'

'I never write on disagreeable subjects,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'No—you—but Muriel?'

'Uncle Chesney, John told me at the first that he and Rose were determined not to trouble you two with home discords. And it did seem kindest, so I have done the same, though I often wanted to speak out to Sibyl.'

'It seems to me a most astounding state of affairs. How did it come about?'

'Muriel is more *au fait* at particulars than I,' said Mrs.

Bertram carelessly. 'John was always doing things to annoy my father.'

'Very unlike John.'

'Yes—only'—and Muriel lifted a flushed face—'only—if it were a matter of conscience with him!'

'Ha!' said Chesney, with a lurking smile. 'John's letters show a change of a sort. Sibyl, you must look out.'

Sibyl smiled and shook her head. 'But did Rose give offence too?' she asked.

'O Rose and John are completely one. The first difficulty I can remember is John's refusing to play for money. Grandpapa was very angry, and John kept cool, but he would not yield. Then he began to work the parish thoroughly, instead of letting it drag on in its old sleepy style. It is a great change there—but grandpapa hates innovations, and can't endure prayer-meetings or missionary societies.'

'Are you of a mind with John or my father?'

'With John.'

'How do you get on without a crash?'

'Ah, you may well ask,' sighed Mrs. Bertram. 'Certainly not through any caution of her own.'

'Grandpapa doesn't think much of the female intellect,' Muriel said, with a gleam of humour. 'Our opinions are of very little importance in his sight, so long as we do what we are told. That is all the womankind is fit for.'

'What was the next mess?' asked Chesney, as Mrs. Bertram rose. Lilias always lay down in her room after dinner, and Mrs. Bertram always 'arranged' her on the sofa. Sibyl and Muriel rose likewise, but Chesney checked them.

'We'll come directly,' he called after his sister. 'I must hear more of this, and my father will be in the drawing-room. Now, Muriel, tell me what can be done to heal the breach.'

'I wish I knew. There is no single thing to take hold of. One great offence was John's declining to come to a large dinner-party on Sunday. I really think grandpapa got it up for *the express* purpose of testing John, for we never do have

dinner-parties on Sunday. I know how miserable it made me, and John and Rose would not come, of course. How could they, feeling as they did? When once grandpapa got into that mood, everything John did and said was wrong. And the crowning offence was about old Sir Timothy.'

'Ha! you had an escape there.'

'Indeed, yes. Sibyl, it was dreadful. Sometimes I thought I should go out of my mind. It seemed as if grandpapa *would* have it, no matter how I struggled. And John just threw himself between, and saved me; but from that week he has never been inside the house. Mamma was very angry with him too for that, but she gets over such feelings. I do not think grandpapa ever does. He prides himself on never taking back what he has once said.'

'Poor dear Muriel,' Sibyl said tenderly. 'You have had some troubles in your life.'

Some! Muriel thought she had had a good many; but she could not say so to Sibyl. Sweet and bright as her friend was, she knew that a deep heart-ache lay below. The silence of both father and mother as to their twins spoke all plainly to Muriel.

'It seems we have come to England for a purpose,' remarked Chesney, getting up. 'By-the-bye, how about Lilias? She looks rather like a will-o'-the-wisp.'

'O Chesney, what a poor simile for one so white and quiet!'

'Like a fading lily, then.' Chesney spoke gravely.

'She has been better since the warm weather set in,' said Muriel. 'I don't think she is well yet; but Lilias can't bear mamma to be made anxious.'

'Your mother as devoted to her youngest as ever?'

'Yes;' and Muriel flushed painfully.

'Never mind. The baby is always the pet, you know,' said Chesney kindly.

The subject of John and Rose was dropped for that evening, though Muriel felt sure it would not be dropped much *longer*. *Meantime Chesney* threw off all appearance

of vexation, and exerted himself to win back his father to a tranquil mood. He was not without success. Baby was brought in for a few minutes, and a family consultation took place upon her brown eyes, as compared with her father's blue and her mother's grey ones. Muriel thought there was something very touching in the expression of Sibyl's face, as she sat looking down upon the infant in her arms—a mingling of meek submission and intense longing.

Sibyl was tired, and it fell to Muriel's lot to conduct her early to bed. Chesney rather hurried her off, but he held back Muriel to whisper,—

'Don't get upon any agitating subjects to-night. She can't stand them.'

'Not if I can help it,' was Muriel's answer.

There did not at first appear any danger. Undressing went on, with quiet talk and an occasional expression of pleasure from each at being together once more. Sibyl's chief wish seemed to be to hear all particulars about Muriel's life. But a little later, she suddenly brought from the table a small velvet-lined case, open in her hand.

'Look,' she said, 'Muriel, here they are. This is much better than the photograph we sent home.'

'Dear Sibyl, not to-night'—for though calm, she shook like an aspen.

'I must. I could not sleep without one look. It is all I have left of them.'

She pressed her lips to one and the other of those two fair little faces.

'I never cry before Chesney if I can help it. He did so love them; and it breaks his heart to see me grieve. O Muriel, my little darlings!'

She buried her face on Muriel's shoulder, catching her breath in half-sobs.

'Sibyl dear, this will make you ill.'

'O no——'

Then she stood up suddenly.

'Is that Chesney's step?'

'I don't think so.'

Sibyl went back to the likenesses, tears dropping heavily. Muriel took the case gently out of her hand.

'No more to-night,' she said, and Sibyl submitted.

'But it does not hurt me,' she said. 'I must give way a little sometimes, you know. Some day it will be a comfort to me to tell you all particulars. I never could write them.'

'Some day—not to-night.'

'No. But oh, Muriel, we had comfort. The look on my precious Rosie's face, as she passed away—I could not describe it to you. It was just radiant. I think she must have seen her Saviour coming for her. I know I felt as if He were in the room.'

'Dearest——' Muriel said tearfully.

'So we had comfort. Sweet Rosie was unconscious at the last, but she had so loved always to hear me speak of the Lord Jesus. And they are both with Him now. That is a joy, isn't it, Muriel?—though I can't always feel it so. His care is better than even a mother's, you know. There—I will not say any more, or I shall not sleep. Tell me all about Lily's health, and about the invalids that you visit,' Sibyl added, with her usual sweet smile.

CHAPTER XV.

IN A SARI.

'I SAY, Sibyl, don't those girls mean to give you your due honours?' asked Chesney, coming down to breakfast with his wife.

'My honours, dear!'

'They seem to lose sight of present relationships.'

'O Chesney, I could not stand their calling me anything but "Sibyl." Muriel has always been my sister—only two years younger than I am. I begged them never to think of such a thing.'

'Nearness of age may be all the better reason for taking care of your dignities; but do as you like, my dear.'

'John does not call you uncle.'

'No; I suppose this is a parallel case.'

Breakfast at first ran on smoothly-oiled wheels. Baby came in for another visit; and Mr. Rivers seemed greatly delighted to have an infant grandchild once more upon his knees. She was a pretty little plump snow-flake, with observant big eyes, and plenty of sense for her eleven months. Mr. Rivers poked her about, and tickled her under the chin, and was in high glee at evoking peals of baby laughter.

But baby being gone, and breakfast being nearly over, Chesney looked up from egg and toast to remark,—

'I am going to see John this morning. Anyone care to come with me?'

Nobody spoke, and he looked at his wife.

'Sibyl, you must not undertake the fatigue so soon?'

'Not to-day. I told Rose it should be soon.'

'Muriel, you used to be a good walker.'

'Muriel shall not go,' said Mr. Rivers roughly.

'Will you come, father?'

Mr. Rivers pulled his moustache with a wrathful air. Words were unequal to the occasion, and he used none.

'Then I must go alone. I expect to be back for luncheon, at don't wait if I should be delayed.'

Which he was, apparently, for the day went by, and Chesy continued an absentee. Now and then Mr. Rivers ne out of his study to inquire—'Chesney back yet?' l each time the after-bang of his study-door waxed louder. Sibyl was taken possession of by Mrs. Bertram all the rning, and Muriel found, or fancied she found, herself *de* in the drawing-room, not as regarded Sibyl, but her her. She stole away to the nursery—extemporized from old play-room—and sat down to play with baby and chat a the ayah. The latter's odd broken English amused her tly. In the drawing-room she was not seen again. er an hour or two, Sibyl and Mrs. Bertram came on a t to the nursery, and stood at the door in amazement—yl smiling, Mrs. Bertram aghast.

For the little ayah was laughing from ear to ear, and baby oned sympathetic delight; while Muriel stood arrayed a clean white sari, with red borders, its folds clothing her the feet, wound and twisted and flung over head and ulders, with the true Eastern ease and elaborate negli-ce. Her own dress lay upon the ground hard by.

O Muriel, Muriel, what a handsome native you would ke!' said Sibyl merrily.

Missie too-muchee-pretty. No like English Mem Sahib,' d the ayah, and some rapid words in Hindostanee followed.

'Ayah thinks you are worthy to be a Brahmin's daughter,' d Sibyl. 'You must take the compliment as meant—but lly you are almost dark enough for a native. And I notice w that you have never quite lost that peculiar way of using

your hands, which Indian children so often catch from their ayahs. O yes—and the little upward toss instead of downward nod of the head for "yes." Most children lose those little ways so soon, but you have managed to keep them. Ah, baby, baby—cousin Muriel makes a grand ayah, doesn't she?'

'Mamma, don't you feel well?' exclaimed Muriel, suddenly in her laughter noticing Mrs. Bertram's livid colouring.

Sibyl threw the window wider open, and Mrs. Bertram sat down by it. 'Thank you, it is no matter—nothing at all,' she said; but when Muriel came near, she turned from her with a manner that bespoke almost loathing. Muriel stepped back as from a dagger, and Sibyl flushed painfully for her.

'Are you better now, Mary?' she asked gravely.

Instead of answering, Mrs. Bertram burst into a violent fit of crying. It was something unwonted. The two exchanged glances, and then the clue to the whole flashed into Sibyl's mind, with the recollection of a certain past conversation. But she could not enlighten Muriel. She could only feel very much vexed with herself for having made matters worse than they needed to have been.

'Would you not like to come to your own room?' asked Sibyl, pitying Muriel, who stood rigidly apart with a look of pain.

'Thank you—your arm, please—and tell Muriel to take off that horrid sari. Nobody must see her in it.'

Mrs. Bertram went slowly away, and Muriel's fun was at an end. Sadly enough she unwound the long muslin folds, and resumed her own dress. She was hidden in her room till luncheon. By that time Mrs. Bertram's equanimity was restored, but her manner to Muriel showed marked coldness.

For the first half of the afternoon Sibyl was claimed for a drive. After that, coming in tired out, she lay down on her bed, and secured Muriel as her only companion.

'*Just* what I have been longing for all day,' Muriel said,

sighing, as she laid her face down on the pillow beside her friend's. 'O Sibyl!'

'O Muriel!' was the gentle echo. 'What could that deep breath have meant?'

'It is not pleasant to be hated.'

'Hush!'

'Particularly by one's mother.'

'Hush, dear! You will be sorry by-and-by.'

'Yes, but it is such a relief to speak out now. How should you feel in my place?'

'I can fancy how unhappy I should feel. But indeed, dear Murie, it is not hate. You don't understand.'

'Do you?'

Sibyl hesitated. 'Understand what?'

'Whatever lies at the root of mamma's dislike to me. Did you not see this afternoon how she shuddered when I came near—as if I had been a toad?'

'Yes, I am sorry she saw you in that dress.'

'Why?'

'Only because of certain associations that she has with it.'

'And you know them—and I do not.'

Sibyl touched her cheek affectionately. 'Murie, I am wife to her brother. I must necessarily come in for little family secrets, which I can't repeat. You understand that.'

'Yes, and I do not mind it—only I don't like anything which seems to put you at a distance from me.'

'Nothing can do that. We are sisters always,' Sibyl said with playful fondness.

'Sibyl, I do wonder at you.'

'Why?'

'Don't you think you are changed?'

'Since when?'

'Old days. It isn't like you to be so bright—when you have such reason to be otherwise. You used to be far more up and down than even I. Mr. Maxwell called me his "little barometer," *but you were always his* "small sensitive-plant."'

Sibyl lay with her hands clasped lightly, and her eyes looking across to the open window, where might be caught a distant view of blue sky kissing purple hills.

'Up and down in what way?' she asked.

'Why, Sibyl—just as I am. One day everything looks sunshiny, and I care for nothing; and another day a wet blanket seems wrapped round one's very being. You know.'

'Yes—I know. I don't think we should yield to such moods.'

'But one can't help the feelings.'

'One can help giving way to the feelings.'

'But don't you get depressed days?'

'Often—just as children get their "cross days." Very much the same thing too. I never feel it right to give way to the feeling, and act as wet blanket to others. I don't say I never do it, Muriel,' she added humbly.

'John is so fond of teaching that Christians should be always happy. But then how impossible it seems. One can't rejoice when there is nothing to rejoice about.'

'I can't imagine such a state of things.'

'Not ever?'

'Never.'

'Not even——'

'Not even when my darlings were taken.'

Tears gathered and dropped slowly, but presently Sibyl went on—'Not even then. I had my Saviour's love still.'

'But—at such a time!'

'I never knew His love was so strong till then. And after a while I could be glad that they were safely housed—no more sin or pain for them—my little precious ones!'

'Don't, darling,' for she was weeping bitterly.

'It isn't meant *not* to be sorrow,' said Sibyl brokenly. 'His tears, you know—that is my comfort. I may grieve because He did. But I shall have them again—and heaven seems nearer than earth sometimes, when I think of them there.'

'If you could rejoice then, I should think you would find it easy to rejoice always.'

'Ah, that is different. People often find it harder to throw off the burden of little daily worries than of great sorrow. The martyrs could sing in the flames, but depend upon it they didn't always sing, when home-folks were troublesome, or unkind words were said, or money affairs went wrong. I find it hard to sing sometimes when life doesn't seem worth the living for. Dear Chesney has always been so patient. But now, Muriel, I am not going to talk any more of myself. Tell me about yourself.'

Muriel, once started, found so much to say that the dressing-bell rang before she had, as Sibyl said, 'finished the first head of her discourse.'

Chesney appeared in time for dinner, hungry, hearty, and bright. He apologised for his long absence. 'I could not resist,' he said, looking straight at his father. 'John was delighted to have me, and, in fact, they would not let me go sooner. Sibyl and I are to take tea there on Friday. What a bonny little mother Rose makes! Connie is a sweet child —quite clung to me when I talked of you, Muriel. John has a pulled look—very good spirits, but I should not fancy him quite strong. This unfortunate division is a distress to him.'

'When you have said as much as you particularly wish, I shall be obliged to you to drop the subject,' said Mr. Rivers.

'By all means, father'—in a most good-humoured tone, Chesney having decided on his course of action. 'What a good fellow John is!—so thorough and hard-working and self-denying. My life looks quite small beside his. We had a long walk together through the old lanes, and tried to fancy ourselves boys together once more.'

But Chesney's face shaded, and a sigh escaped him. Perhaps the attempt had proved a failure.

CHAPTER XVI.

EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES.

CHESNEY RIVERS did his best to bridge over the family chasm, but found his engineering skill unequal to the task. Beyond freedom for himself and Sibyl to go when they would to Bushby Rectory, and beyond the bringing up of John's name at meal-times, his efforts were a failure.

For about two months he and Sibyl stayed at the Manor, before going on a round of visits to friends. One to John and Rose stood first on the list, and Muriel looked forward greatly to having her uncle and Sibyl in and out from that house. But Mr. Rivers looked forward to the same with different sensations, and a month at the sea-side was arranged to correspond to the precise date of the Bushby Rectory visit.

The two months were happy ones with Muriel. She was completely engrossed by Sibyl's companionship, and her newly-deepened interest in Lilias flagged a good deal. Muriel hardly knew it herself, but the two sisters fell apart in their old style, and Lilias resumed her wonted iciness of manner.

Muriel, so long as she could have Sibyl, was content. Hers was alike a clinging and an absorbing love. Cramer Ray had small space to himself in her recollection, those days. In truth, her girlish love had died a slow death years before; and only the loneliness of her life, making her ready to grasp at any change, had caused the passing if not altogether spurious revival of it. The marked kindness of her uncle Chesney was a pleasure, but to Sibyl she clung with touching devotion. She marvelled more each day at the change in her friend—at the steadfast calm and the quiet

peace which nothing seemed to disturb. Muriel gained a thirst for the same in her own life.

Not unfrequently Montgomery Maxwell made a third in the rambles which Muriel and her uncle took together. Chesney was not scientific, and he often stood with a comical smile, watching the tutor's heroic plunges among nettles and briars for some coveted prize—a very worthless prize in the Major's eyes. He learnt a few botanical terms, however, in his walks, and aired them afterwards with much satisfaction for the benefit of the family circle.

He was a pleasant fellow, this Chesney Rivers, true-hearted and outspoken as a child, blunt yet gentle, and always simple. When first married he had made no profession of religion; and Sibyl, though brought up with a good head-knowledge of Divine things, cared little for them in her heart. A year later the great change had first come to her; though it was the recent loss of her two children which had so lifted her up and borne her on. This serenity was a thing altogether new. Muriel would scarcely have recognised, save in form and feature, the high-spirited fluctuating maiden of earlier days.

Chesney Rivers stood far behind. He was scarcely a decided man—neither decidedly worldly, nor decidedly a follower of Christ. He had strong leanings to the better side—strong longings for higher joys—strong searchings after that which should make him sure of meeting his children in another world. He counted his wife as something saintly and beyond other women, and perhaps he looked to her little hand to draw him upwards. He had not yet learnt to look to Christ alone.

Muriel learned and gained much from this two months' companionship. For the time being she was disposed to forget certain little duties, to lose sight of other people's feelings, and even to neglect visiting her invalid friends. Had Sibyl remained long in the house this would have grown to be a snare. As it was, the good effects weighed most heavily, and Muriel made many upward paces.

Looking forward, she did not see a bright prospect, a Sibyl's departure. Lilias was cold as ever, and Muriel not discovered the fact of this being, at least in a meas her own fault. Moreover, Mrs. Bertram seemed quite un to forget the wearing of the sari, which had so troubled She kept Muriel more than ever at a distance.

Others noted this, Montgomery Maxwell not least. spoke to Chesney one day upon the subject, remarking keen a trial her mother's lack of affection was to Muriel

'Do you think so?' asked Chesney. 'My wife says same; but the coldness has been uniform from infancy. would imagine she must have grown used to it.'

'She has not, I assure you. Muriel is exceedingly of Mrs. Bertram.'

'Nobody can resist being that, witch that she always laughed Chesney. 'However, I don't see what is to be d

'You do not! I have hoped something from you. cause—if cause there is——'

'Then you don't know the reason?'

'No, indeed I do not.'

'H'm!' said Chesney thoughtfully.

'I have believed it to be one of those inexplicable c of natural aversion, sometimes seen.'

'And the fact has never oozed out even to you. Well sister's life-aim has been to keep it secret, but people d always succeed so well.'

'You don't mean—I have had my conjectures I confe that Muriel is really the daughter of a first wife? But conceal it?'

'Nothing of that sort. O no, you are wide of the m The fact is, anything which touches my sister's pride misery to her; and Muriel unfortunately pulls up ce recollections which do touch her pride. I don't, for part, feel much hope of the feeling being got over—til folks concerned are a good many years older. My siste *not very* strong-minded or wide in her ideas, and little th *seem great* to her.'

Montgomery assented, anxious for more.

'You take a particular interest in Muriel,' said Chesney in an odd tone.

'I always did,' the tutor answered meekly, with a faint blush.

'She is a splendid girl. I am glad that young Ray never had her—though he is my wife's cousin. But I wish some one of the right stamp would win her.'

'I think—I hope—I believe—I could be glad of—of anything—that should be for her happiness,' faltered Montgomery.

'Ah!' Chesney said, and he said no more.

'It is desirable for her, as you say,' continued Montgomery nervously. 'Yes, very desirable. Only I do not think I know any one worthy of her. But the right man may turn up some day. Yes, he may—undoubtedly he may.'

Montgomery sighed deeply.

'I wish he would,' responded Chesney. 'I hope the wrong man will not seek her. She has gone through enough of that already.'

Montgomery lifted his eyes suddenly, with steady look and voice.

'Major Rivers, you have seen more than I meant you to see. But do not misunderstand me. I have no thought of winning Muriel.'

'None?'

'Absolutely none. I don't deny the fact of what she is to me—trusting to your generosity to keep my secret. But as for giving her a hint—never! I know my position and hers too well. I have guarded myself for years, and I will guard myself still. If I could not, I would go away at once.'

Chesney's look was grave, though kind.

'It is a critical position,' he said. 'One slip of the tongue, and Muriel's peace may be destroyed for years.'

'Have I not seen what she has borne already? Even if I had the slightest reason to suppose I could arouse a return of what *I feel, do you think I* would do it?'

Chesney was silent.

'Think for a moment. You do not yourself know the state of affairs better than I do. Muriel can never be mine. You see I am perfectly well aware of this. I have made up my mind to it. There are no tossings of uncertainty in my case. I have no shadow of hope, and hopelessness brings a calm with it. She is completely cut off from me. I think my love for her is growing to be almost a father's love. She will marry happily some day, and I shall rejoice to see it. Perhaps I shall have left Claverton before then. But you may trust me. I would not willingly add a single shadow to the poor child's life. For myself—if shadow comes, God's will be done. It is not new to me.'

He spoke very quietly, and even with something of a smile, though a slight dew broke out upon his forehead. Then he rose and left the room. Chesney made no effort to detain him. He knew how hopeless a case it was.

Not till many hours later did Montgomery recollect the information which he had after all missed receiving. He had to wait a day or two for an opportunity to see the Major again alone. Chesney gave the explanation briefly, adding—

'I have had some doubts whether to tell you, after all. But—perhaps you have a right to know. I trust to you not to mention it again—and I only wish it might make a difference in your feelings.'

'As to Muriel? Impossible. But how grievous—how unfair!' said Montgomery, greatly moved. 'Muriel—why, Muriel is literally no more touched by the fact than Lilias and Arthur; yet Mrs. Bertram does not visit it upon them. Strange! She—Muriel's own mother—a mother to look so upon her child——'

'Ah, there you pass my comprehension. But the discovery was a great shock to my sister. Her pride was wounded to the quick.'

'But why single out Muriel alone to suffer? The position of Lilias and Arthur is precisely the same.'

'Look at their faces. That is answer enough,' said the Major.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT AND ABOUT.

'It is the way with everything in this world,' said Mrs. Rokeby. 'Nothing but disappointment and decay. Pleasures never last. Friends are sure to vanish. I have learnt to be surprised at nothing, darling Sophy. It is a sorrowful life, full of change, and full of heart-ache.'

'Mamma, I don't believe Miss Bertram has changed.'

'She has only grown tired of us. That is change. But it is just what we ought to have expected.'

'I would rather expect the best till the worst comes. And I don't think it is Miss Bertram's way to get tired of people.'

'Quite right to hope charitably for the best. But when you have seen more of human nature—dear child, there is no reliance to be placed on it.'

'Miss Bertram cannot be fickle,' Sophy said resolutely, preferring to keep clear of generalities.

'This is the third Wednesday that she has not come.'

'There is some good reason. She never stays away if she can help it.'

'Well—charity ought to "believe all things,"' said Mrs. Rokeby again. 'She means most kindly, I am sure. But there are other attractions just now. She only came three times in the five weeks before the last fortnight. I don't complain, for such disappointments are all meant to do us good; but it does go to one's heart to see how the best and kindest fail.'

Sophy kept silence, with a fear of being betrayed into overmuch warmth.

'I used to think Miss Bertram might really be a help to me as well as to you,' continued Mrs. Rokeby, after a slight pause for the adjustment of her crochet. 'There is something about her so strong and bright—in contrast with my tendency to depression—that I quite hoped to gain real benefit from the companionship. But that is entirely at an end.'

'Mamma, she will come again.'

'She may. Yes, when she has nothing better to do she very probably will. But I feel that she has failed, and therefore her power over me is gone. I believe I am peculiarly sensitive to inconsistencies in the Christian life. Not that I would blame others—O no. I am the last person in the world to judge. But where I see a failure I can no longer learn from such an one. I feel that we are weak together, and on a par as to experience.'

Sophy looked rather impatient. 'I really don't see why we are to expect other people to be so much more perfect than ourselves,' she said.

'My dear child, I expect nothing,' responded Mrs. Rokeby, with gentle resignation. 'I look for nothing. This sort of thing only confirms my knowledge of human nature. The world is full of failure and disappointment.'

'Mamma!' said Sophy.

For the door stood open, and the little maid, having vainly sought to gain a hearing, stood blankly open-mouthed, with Muriel Bertram and Sibyl Rivers in her rear. Sibyl had been to call once before, and was not quite a stranger to Sophy, though she had missed seeing Mrs. Rokeby.

'How do you do, Mrs. Rokeby?' said Muriel cheerfully.

Mrs. Rokeby's 'How do you do?' had a mournful sound.

'Have you thought yourself quite forgotten of late, Sophy?' asked Muriel, standing at the foot of the couch. 'Do you know we must hardly venture to sit down to-day. My uncle *will* call directly, to take us for a drive; but we determined *to* secure one little peep.'

But Sibyl took the offered seat beside Sophy. 'I am afraid I have to plead guilty,' she said. 'Muriel's visits to her friends have been a good deal interrupted lately on my account. We have not been together for so long.'

'O yes—I quite understand,' Sophy could answer heartily, while Mrs. Rokeby drooped her eyes.

'We all leave home directly,' said Muriel. 'I shall not be here again for a month, Sophy; but after that I hope to be quite regular again.'

'A whole month! But it will do you good,' said Sophy.

'I would rather have been at home.'

Muriel looked absent and constrained. Sophy had never seen her so before, and was perplexed.

'Are you going to the sea together?' she asked.

'O no,' was all Muriel said.

'My husband and I have a good many visits to pay,' explained Sibyl. 'But by-and-by we hope to come again to the Manor-house.'

'How Miss Bertram will miss you!' Sophy murmured, with a wistful glance at her friend.

Muriel could stand no discussion on that head. She was in no mood for it, being exceedingly heartsore, and she dashed forthwith into other subjects—anything that occurred to her—doing most of the talking herself. Sophy said little. There was no getting below superficial chat that day. Sibyl made an attempt, but found Sophy shy, Mrs. Rokeby plaintive, and Muriel irresponsive. And in ten minutes the carriage came.

'Now we must go,' said Muriel. 'Dear Sophy, I am very sorry to have paid you such a flying visit, but it could not be helped. I hope to do better by-and-by. Take good care of yourself till I come back again.'

Sophy smiled good-bye as usual, and when they were gone she lay silent.

'Just as I thought,' Mrs. Rokeby averred. 'Miss Bertram has *grown tired of us.*'

'Mamma, I don't think so. She is hurried to-day—and troubled.'

'My dear Sophy, the thing is clear as daylight.'

Sophy felt that her own daylight had grown cloudy. If she did not believe in Muriel being fickle, she had nevertheless a sense of disappointment. It weighed upon her heavily for awhile. She seemed left very much without help and cheer in her life. Muriel had been a bright spot to her hitherto, but the bright spot was suddenly dimmed. Must it be so always? Was life indeed full to the close of nothing but disappointed expectation?

Sophy went through a little bout of depression. Then there came a whisper of comfort in her heart—a thought of One who could never change.

'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.'

'That is enough—isn't it?' murmured Sophy, smiling, her mother having left the room. 'He is always the same. No ups and downs in His love for me—no fear of His being too busy to sympathise. Heaven and earth may pass, but He does not change. O that is something to rejoice in, if there were nothing else. "God's everlasting love! What wouldst thou more?"'

Sophy felt that she wanted no more. She would not have been without the brief pain, which brought such sweetness with it. She drew nearer to her Lord that day.

'Why, Muriel dear,' said Sibyl, after they had got some way, 'you were not quite yourself.'

'No. How do you like Mrs. Rokeby?'

'She is lady-like.'

Muriel looked restlessly over the corn-fields as they drove through a lane. She and Sibyl sat side by side, with Chesney opposite.

'I ought to have gone alone,' she said. 'Our visit was a failure. Your being there kept me on the stretch.'

'Dear Muriel—why?'

'I can't bear you to go away. I suppose that is the *reason*. I was in a mood to be unnatural.'

'But why be governed by passing moods?'

'Ah, you said something of that sort once before. But how to keep them in check——'

'You and I may not be able. There is always "the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe."'

'We don't make the most of that,' said Muriel, with a sigh. 'I do generally master my moods in visiting the sick, but one now and then proves too much for me. So you like Mrs. Rokeby?'

'She is ladylike—and pleasant.'

'You heard her words as we went in—characteristic of her—"The world is full of disappointment and failure." She sings a minor song, as John would say. O Sibyl—for a sight of John!'

'I wish you could have it.'

'My key is minor to-day, I am afraid. "Full of disappointment and failure." I could sing that from my heart.'

'I have a better song,' said Sibyl. '"The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord;" and "The earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."'

'I can believe both—sometimes,' said Muriel.

'I can believe always. I can realise sometimes.'

'Only sometimes?'

'Yes.'

'I am glad. That brings us nearer together.'

'You should wish better things for me. The goodness and the glory don't die out, merely because we don't see them, any more than the sun dies out whenever a cloud comes between.'

'But the "glory" is future, and trouble is present.'

'Don't you think one can rejoice in future happiness? Besides, the goodness fills the earth now—beauty and loving-kindness on every side. It seems to me that in a sense the glory is here too, even now.'

'I don't see how.'

'The glory of His power—shown in His works. "The heavens declare the glory of God," you know. And the

glory of His love, shown in redemption. And the glory of His presence—spiritual and actual too. He is here, though we can't see Him, except by faith. We can't see the angels, but we know they are busy round us. And we can't see God, but we know He is in our midst. It seems to me that there is "glory" literally on every side—only not manifest yet to our bodily senses. That is future. O Muriel—what the first lifting of the veil must be!'

Sibyl's eyes were full, almost to overflowing.

'Look here,' Chesney interposed for the first time. He had listened in silence hitherto. 'There is a poor fellow toiling up the hill just ahead, who seems to have reached the end of his powers. Suppose we give him a lift. He has a respectable appearance.'

They overtook the said figure, and Muriel gave one breathless exclamation.

'Very respectable,' said Sibyl. 'Why, it is John!'

The carriage stopped, and John Rivers came to the door.

'How do you all do? Why, Muriel——'

'Ought I to run away? O John!' and she held his hand tightly.

'You don't run away while under my charge,' said Chesney. 'Get in, John.'

'I shall land you in difficulties.'

'We'll float out of them again. Nonsense—get in. Muriel has nothing to do with it. We will take you on a little way, and drop you near your own door as we return.'

'Too tempting an offer to be refused this hot day.'

Muriel did not like the air of lassitude which crept over him, as he leant back in his seat. Usually his vigour was unconquerable, but he had grown somewhat hollow-cheeked, and his hands looked thin.

'John, you have not been well lately?' she said.

'May we exchange remarks?' asked John.

'I don't know. O John, I can't help it. Uncle Chesney has decided for us.'

'Of course I have. I am the person in authority just now. Leave me to settle with my father. How is Rose?'

'Awake all night, and in bed all to-day, with face-ache. Well otherwise.'

'The carriage swept under over-arching trees, through which the sunbeams came in broken freckles. 'This is pleasant,' John said. 'One can appreciate these hedges, driving.'

'My dear fellow, you were appreciating nothing but the dust when we overtook you,' said Chesney. 'I never saw a man more deep in contemplation.'

'Was I?'—and a pause.

'John, what are you thinking about?' asked Muriel.

'Things in general;' with a half smile.

'Everything in general, and nothing in particular,' suggested Chesney. 'Don't believe him, Muriel. He is too tired to have a single thought in his head.'

'How is my grandfather?' asked John.

'I see a great change in him.' Chesney spoke hastily, but stopped short, for John flushed and paled as a girl might do.

'A change!'

'He is getting old. What can we expect?' asked Chesney rather gravely.

'Yes, but—he has been strong hitherto.'

'For his age, perhaps.'

'Then he has not been the same lately as he was.'

'I don't know. Coming home, I suppose the difference strikes me.'

John looked at Muriel. 'Mamma sometimes says he has failed a little,' she said unwillingly. 'I don't see much difference—only he cannot walk so far.'

'This wretched division is wearing you both out,' said Chesney.

'I think it really is that,' added Sibyl. 'The expression of his face is so unhappy at times.'

'The most hopeful thing is his allowing intercourse on our part with us,' said John.

'Allowing!' repeated Chesney. 'He would never have given leave, if I had not taken it.'

'He has not banished you in consequence.'

'He may try yet. I shall decline to be banished—treat it all as a joke. Why didn't you?'

John shook his head. 'It was in too serious earnest.'

'Why don't you come to the Manor and see me some day?'

'My dear Chesney!' said his wife.

'Rather a wild plan. But it is enough to drive one to wild expedients. Such nonsense—foolery—and worse! What on earth does he get by it all?'

'Thy father,' John said very softly.

'True,' Chesney answered; but he broke out hotly the next minute—'Family quarrels! how I hate them! Pride and folly at the bottom of every one.'

'"Only by pride cometh contention,"' quoted John. '"He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." You have high authority for your opinion.'

'I am afraid I forgot my authority. However, I have come to the conclusion that taking offence is the most undignified action under the sun. I wish you would give me a string of texts to quote at my father.'

'You would not have the run of the Manor much longer.'

'Then we come to you.'

'Mamma thinks living entirely in peace with everybody quite impossible,' said Muriel. 'She says we are only expected to do it so much as in us lies. I told her of your sermon, John.'

'Curious plea for a thief before a court of justice,' said John quaintly. '"My lord, I earnestly wish to be honest as much as in me lies. Unfortunately, it did not lie in me to be honest on that particular occasion." The verdict would hardly be a pitying acquittal. Why don't people use their common-sense in religion?'

'Some folks have none to use,' said Chesney.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER THE ELM.

BUSHBY RECTORY was reached, and Chesney sprang out.

'You are not going in?' his wife said.

'Yes, I am. I have some presents for the children in my pockets. Don't you and Muriel want to see Rose?'

'Sibyl can go,' said Muriel hurriedly. 'I must wait here.'

'Nonsense. I'll settle it all,' said Chesney.

'I ought not.'

'Conscientiousness may run into squeamishness,' said Chesney. 'Come—both of you.'

Muriel's eyes went appealingly to John.

'What do you think? May I? He would be angry, but——'

'I can't bear to put a spoke in the wheel for Rose's sake,' aid John. 'But I think you are right.'

'It was not my doing that uncle Chesney took you up, nd brought me here,' said Muriel. 'And I really don't ink I am bound to go so far as to refuse to speak to you, ohn. But going into your house would be a different matter.) how I should like to see Rose?' and she sighed.

'You goose! why don't you!' said Chesney. Nevertheless, ıe saw an under-current of something like admiration in his ce, and she did not yield.

'Don't hurry yourself, Sibyl,' she said. 'I do not mind)w long I wait. If only Rose had not a cold!'

The carriage was drawn up under the shade of an elm, a tle way from the garden gate. Muriel leant back silently, the others walked away, feeling herself pulled strongly

house-ward, and wondering if her resolution would hold o
All at once she found John again by her side, standing clo
to the carriage, with an arm upon the door.

'I want you to tell me honestly how my grandfather i
he said. The old coachman being somewhat deaf, they we
virtually *tête-à-tête.*

'He is not ill. He does age, certainly. But what can o
expect? He is not far from eighty.'

'How does the change appear?'

'I hardly know. He walks less—sleeps more—seer
feeble altogether at times. Not when anything excites hi
There is no weakening of will.'

'No signs of yielding?'

'None that I can see. John, you don't look as you ough

'I am not very well to-day.'

'Has anything been wrong with you lately?'

'Nothing much. I have not my usual strength.'

Then he asked, 'How with you, Muriel?'

'I get down-hearted sometimes—depressed—out of sor
There is always something.'

'Always something to keep you from always rejoicing?'

'Yes. Isn't it natural?'

'Perfectly natural. But the child of God has not to li
the natural life. I dare say St. Paul had "always som
thing" too, but it did not hinder him from "always rejoicing!

'It does not hinder Sibyl,' said Muriel very low. 'But
can't get to that state of things.'

'What is the "something" now?' he asked.

'I can't bear Sibyl's going away. I shall be so lonely again
You don't know what it is.'

'I can imagine.'

'There is no one to speak to—no one who understand
me—except Mr. Maxwell.'

John was silent.

'Mamma is colder to me than ever. Lilias and I nev
have been friends in any sense.'

'Not enemies, I hope.'

'You understand, I know. Sometimes I think mamma almost hates me.'

'Never think so again.'

'I can't help it. Does it not seem so?'

'No. Never allow yourself to think that.'

'I'll try to obey. But as for rejoicing——'

'Well?'

'It has not been difficult with Sibyl at hand. But now——'

'The command stands the same.'

'Everything will seem dull and spiritless.'

'Maybe—so far as Sibyl, or earthly sympathy in any sense is concerned. I don't say you can expect not to be troubled, or depressed, or afflicted, but yet you have to rejoice *in the Lord*, who appoints or permits all things.'

'There lies the impossibility.'

'Difficulty, not impossibility.'

Muriel thought for a minute.

'John, you don't know what it is to be depressed.'

'Don't I?'—rather drily.

'Do you?'

'Why, you settle the question for me.'

'I didn't think it was your way.'

'You judge from the outside too much.'

'Then you do sometimes?'

'Do what?'

'Feel depressed.'

'I have had some hard fights against the sensation lately. Don't tell Rose.'

'What about?' asked Muriel. 'Has anything been the matter?'

John laughed a little.

'Now see how unreasonable you are,' he said, '*You* must have your ups and downs, your bright days and dull days, and only be expected to rejoice "as much as in you lies," and nobody is to look for a reasonable explanation of each

state. While I, not being supposed to have an that way, must have no sensation of dulness, with hauled over the coals, if I can't give a precisely cause.'

'Then you have had no particular cause.'

'I dare say I have. Headache one day—tired next—disinclination for work the third—parish v fourth—home anxieties the fifth. What of all that say, there is always something. The burden of li upon me sometimes, Muriel, as upon others. But t for rejoicing never change.'

'You can't always feel them.'

'I do not at all times equally realise. I know a them to be always the same.'

'And you don't lose them completely—lose sig altogether—as I do! What is the reason?'

'What affects you most?'

'Why when things don't go smoothly. Unl loneliness—friends leaving.'

'They can't touch the true joy; it lies over tl such matters.'

'I don't see how.'

'Fancy yourself standing by the sea-shore. Lo the light comes down to you steadily. Look dc water, and every ripple breaks the reflection. Yo gaze is too low.'

'But when these troubles come, one must feel,' s

'Feel! My dear child, our Lord and Master w stoic. Did HE not feel?'

'But if one is unhappy——'

'You may keep the heavenly gladness thr sorrow—through even depression.'

Muriel looked incredulous.

'Can't you imagine walking in a drizzling fog, and uncomfortable, and yet having a glow of pleas heart, because of a long letter just received from

'Or from you!'

'Well—if you like. Is it impossible that you should be chilled and pained at some home-unkindness, and yet have a restful feeling alongside, in the certainty of how dear you are to Rose and me?'

Muriel's tears were dropping.

'You see we are complex creatures,' he said gently. 'But your heart is fully with Sibyl. Is it fully set on Christ?'

'Something may be wrong there.'

'When Sibyl goes you will grieve. But why must that touch the rejoicing in Jesus? He is not going. Be glad in Him still.'

'I will,' she said in a low voice.

'Perhaps a want of yielding has hindered you hitherto.'

'Yielding what?' she asked.

'Yourself—your way—your will. If you are fighting or even murmuring for your own way, you cannot rejoice in His. There must be willing acceptance first.'

'I thought I had learnt submission, at all events.'

'That is one step. Submission leads to the state of quiet resignation. Happy acceptance leads to rejoicing. What if Sibyl does go, and your life is somewhat lonely? It is the will of One dearer to you than Sybil. Then take it with a smile, and delight the more in Him.'

'John, I don't think I have the right sort of spirit in me to do that.'

'Ask,' said John emphatically. 'Ask, and ask again. It is a marvellous thing to hear God's children bemoaning their spiritual wants, when they may have all they need for the asking.'

'I see your meaning more now,' said Muriel, after a pause. 'I have been thinking I must altogether leave off minding trouble and feeling dull, before I could think about joy.'

'You need not be dull,' said John. 'Don't bury the spirit of gladness under a velvet pall.'

Chesney's hand came on John's shoulder.

'Rose has dressed and is muffling up in a shawl. She won't be content without seeing Muriel. What is wrong with you, John, to-day?'

'Rose is imprudent. I don't know that it will hurt her, though,' for Muriel looked eager delight.

'No fear. She says you have not been quite yourself lately.'

'Rose never questioned my identity before.'

'She does now—rather dubious evidently. Ha! here she comes.'

And face-ache or no face-ache, to get Rose and Muriel apart under ten minutes was impossible. After that the children came out, and time slipped away unnoticed.

Dinner was over before the carriage reached the Manor.

'Can't be helped,' Chesney said composedly. 'Get ready both of you. I will see my father in his study.'

'Uncle Chesney, he must know all about me,' said Muriel.

'Every bit, my honest niece. Don't be afraid.'

And he went—to be closeted for some time. When he came to Sibyl and Muriel he had a grave face.

'Poor John!' were his first words.

'Was he much vexed?' asked Sibyl.

'I begin to doubt whether I ever saw a man in a passion before. Muriel was right not to go into the house. That would have been a tremendous offence.'

'Uncle, you told him I was with John—talking.'

'Told him all—so far as he would listen. However, don't be alarmed. I sheltered you, and the storm spent itself on my shoulders. Good thing I have pretty broad ones.'

'And he is not angry now?' asked Sibyl.

'I dare say he will have grown cooler by to-morrow.'

They saw no more of Mr. Rivers that night. Chesney, with quiet nonchalance, had talked much of John, and the old man's heart was stirred within him to keen and bitter pain.

CHAPTER XIX.

FADING.

THE month at the seaside was lengthened to six weeks. Until Sibyl and Chesney had left Bushby Rectory for London, old Mr. Rivers would not hear of returning.

The weeks passed as weeks beside the sea usually do pass. There was bathing, and sitting on the shingles, and driving out, and pacing of the parade, and ransacking of the library, and meeting of friends unexpectedly. At first Muriel rambled about alone a good deal, reading and thinking. The thinking was to some purpose. Certain heart-searchings were followed by self-condemnation. Self-complacency fled before stronger self-knowledge.

Thought for others followed. She made the effort once again to break through the ice-crust which covered over the opening to her sister's heart. A hard surface it had seemed, and little hope felt Muriel of success a second time. But the ice yielded as to a mere finger-touch. It came over Muriel strangely one day, that while she had complained of loneliness, one by her very side had been vainly thirsting for her sympathy, and suffering from a loneliness no less real than her own. For Mrs. Bertram could not satisfy Lilias' needs.

Sea-air did not seem to do Lilias good. She was listless and weak, and the cough had returned. A doctor was called in, and his air was grave. What he said to Mrs. Bertram Muriel did not know. She only saw by her mother's haggard expression, whenever Lilias was not present, that great fear lay below.

Intense pity grew up in Muriel's heart towards her mother. She had not known the feeling before. Suppose Lilias were to die! Muriel hardly thought of herself in the matter. She could not picture her mother existing without Lilias. Mrs. Bertram, deprived of her youngest child, would be objectless, broken-hearted.

'Better far that I should die,' thought Muriel sadly, and yet she did not know that it was so in reality. 'That would be a small matter to mamma—but what would she do if she had not Lilias?'

The fading went on—intermittent, uncertain, but with a steady downward tendency. Waves might now and then break higher, nevertheless the tide was going out.

Was Lilias ready? Muriel put that question to herself often with an aching heart. She could not tell. A happier spirit of intercourse had by this time grown up between the sisters, and coldness seemed to have fled, but Lilias' reserve was unconquerable. Sometimes Muriel ventured a few words on religious subjects. They were heard quietly, but no response came, and Lilias' pale passive face was at all times hard to read. No reserve is so tenacious of existence as the reserve of a rather small nature. There was in Lilias no breadth of mind or passion of soul to work upon. She had been passively cold; she grew to be gently affectionate. That was all; and if Muriel looked for more she met with disappointment.

Muriel hardly realised how steadily her sister had gone down the hill, till they reached home. Looking back six weeks, she plainly saw the change, and Mrs. Bertram saw it too. No one talked of Lilias as ill, but she was rarely off the sofa, and a doctor's visit every day had grown to be a thing of course. Their own doctor, coming in next morning for the first time, wore for an instant a startled look. Muriel wondered whether Lilias observed it. The quiet white face showed no change. But an hour later Muriel found her mother alone in an agony of weeping.

'Mamma——' said Muriel timidly. She could better have comforted any one in the world than her own mother.

Mrs. Bertram drew herself suddenly upright on the sofa.

'What is wanted?'

'Mamma, has it anything to do with Lilias?'

'Nothing that concerns you,' said Mrs. Bertram coldly. 'I do not wish to talk just now.'

Muriel's eyes were full. 'It does concern me,' she said in a trembling voice. 'Lily is my sister, and surely I ought to know. Does Dr. Peters think very badly of her?'

'Doctors are often mistaken. You are not to say anything depressing to Lilias.'

'Mamma, does she know she is in danger?'

'I did not say she was.'

But it would not do. Self-control failed there. Mrs. Bertram's head went down in a pitiful anguish of sobs. Muriel had a very passion of longing to kneel down, and throw her arms round that bowed graceful figure, and beg her mother to be comforted. She dared not do so. Her own tears fell like rain, and she was shaken by weeping scarcely less violent than Mrs. Bertram's—yet not so much for Lilias, as for the lack of her mother's love. The one pain swallowed up the other.

In a little while the words came again—'You must not tell Lilias. She is not to know.'

'She ought to know.'

'She shall not. That is her only hope.'

'Is there any hope?' asked Muriel mournfully.

Again no answer, except convulsive sobs. Mrs. Bertram presently rose, and went away to her own room, stifling sounds of grief by the way.

Neither of the two dared show herself to Lilias for some time after. But at luncheon Mrs. Bertram appeared, calm and collected, with no traces of tears, while Muriel's eyes were heavy, and her face flushed with weeping. Lilias' eyes were often upon her.

Luncheon over, Mrs. Bertram called her apart.

'Muriel, this will not do,' she said. 'You must not give Lilias any reason to suppose we feel anxiety.'

'Is it right?' asked Muriel.

'Of course it is right. I will have nothing else. You understand. Lilias must not think anything of her illness. She was watching your face all luncheon.'

'I know,' Muriel said sorrowfully.

'You must command yourself better. If you cry it shows in your face so long after,' continued Mrs. Bertram, without a trace of the morning's anguish in tone or look. 'The only way is for you to keep from crying.'

'I could not help it,' faltered Muriel.

'You must learn to do so. Lilias has made me promise to go out for an hour's drive this afternoon, leaving you in charge of her. But unless I can depend upon you, I will not go.'

'I will take care,' said Muriel.

'If she asks you why you cried, you are not to tell the reason.'

'It was not only for Lilias,' Muriel said half to herself.

'It was not?'

'No—not only.'

'What was it?'

Muriel could not speak at the moment. Afterwards she wished that the heart-ache within had broken forth in words.

'Well, tell her anything you like, except what will make her nervous about herself. Mind, Muriel, I depend upon you. If you disappoint me, you shall not be left alone with her again.'

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER LETTER.

It was a chilly afternoon, or the invalid felt it so. A small fire burnt in the drawing-room grate. Lilias lay upon the sofa beside it, colourless as a snow-flake. The red gleams of fire-light fell alike upon her and upon Muriel's bent head, as she read aloud from a book. Suddenly Muriel glanced up, and met her sister's gaze.

'I never can look at you without your looking back at me,' observed Lilias.

'It is my way. I always have the feeling of being watched. Do you like this book, Lilias?'

'I don't think I heard much.'

'Too busy with your own thoughts?' asked Muriel, trying to be cheerful.

'I was wondering what you had been crying about this morning.'

'A little storm clears the air sometimes.'

'Yes, but something must have happened.'

'*I* am wondering what you were thinking about just now,' said Muriel.

A faint flush rose in Lilias' cheeks.

'Nothing particular,' she said. 'I was only thinking—it seems strange that any one should not love you.'

Muriel gave her a kiss, and sat silent.

'You are thinking of mamma,' she said presently. 'It was that—partly—this morning.'

'Was it? Are you sure?'

'Yes—partly.'

'What did she say?'

'Never mind. Something brought up the feeling, and I could not help myself.'

'She will care for you more, some day.'

'I don't think so.' Muriel spoke quietly, remembering her mother's injunctions. The sisters had not exchanged a word on this subject since childish days. It had been a matter for stormy jealousy on the part of Muriel, not long before.

'She will,' repeated Lilias. And then, with an effort, 'Promise me never to leave off loving her.'

'How could I?' asked Muriel.

'No, I suppose not. She is your mother as much as she is mine. Only things are different for you.'

'Lilias, do you know why?' Muriel asked the question suddenly, bluntly.

'No. What do you mean?'

'I thought you might know.'

'No. Mothers often have favourites, don't they?'

'Not often—I hope,' said Muriel slowly. 'There is a reason, and Sibyl knows it—but I do not.'

'If mamma wished me to know it she would have told me,' said Lilias. 'Never mind. You will be more to her some day, Muriel. I am sure of it.'

Muriel looked at her silently. There was something a little strange in Lilias' manner.

'What do you mean? Why do you think so?' she asked.

Lilias gave no answer at first. In a few seconds she said, in a low voice, 'You will—have to comfort her. Poor mamma!'

Muriel did not know what to reply. She dared not take it for granted that she understood Lilias' meaning, yet the words gave her a thrill of hope and pain. Before she had found an answer, Mr. Rivers walked in, holding two letters. One he tossed into Muriel's lap. The other he kept unopened, his features working excitedly the while.

does Chesney say?' he demanded, having recog-
it-mark and handwriting.
is very poorly, and she has asked uncle Chesney to
ne.'
an read the letter aloud.'
an' was equivalent to a 'must.' Muriel knew it to
d she knew also that her uncle would not mind.
l have written just as frankly to Mr. Rivers himself.
tation lasted only a moment, but there came an
'Make haste, will you!' in that space. Muriel

DEAR MURIEL,
byl is so poorly that I have taken up pen in her
ıe has done too much lately, and is quite laid by.
: thing now is to keep her from worry.
enjoyed our visit at the Rectory extremely. Sibyl
sent you particulars, but she says she has not
tely. The boys are fine little fellows—and Connie
child. Sibyl could not always stand seeing her.
is rather *like*—you know—at least Sibyl thought
v the resemblance less, but it helped to upset Sibyl,
' '

on earth does he mean?' demanded Mr. Rivers.
thinks Connie like the twins,' said Muriel. 'She
ɔ one day.'
ey might as well have said what he meant. Go on.'
ı not satisfied about John. He seems thoroughly
'—no strength for anything. I don't know what
over him. Nothing makes Rose nervous. John
ıted away the evening before we left—no reason
t any one knew. Rose did not seem anxious,
e said she had never seen him do such a thing
ut Sibyl and I do not like it. Could you not get
alk over there, and send us word how he is?"'
thundered Mr. Rivers.

'"We have no chance of hearing otherwise. I have just seen your aunt Constance. A good deal altered, but I should have known her anywhere. She cried at seeing me, poor thing. Her only boy seems a great care to her—rather a troublesome youth. She has lost all her old liveliness.

'"Let Sibyl have a cheerful letter from you. That will do her more good than anything. Baby is well. We are going to stay with the Irwins next week, if Sibyl is fit to be moved.

'"Your affectionate uncle,

'"CHESNEY RIVERS."'

'Very well! Then he need not expect to be welcomed here at present!' was the stern comment.

Muriel's face whitened. Was it coming to that?

Mr. Rivers held the other letter for an instant before her eyes, and then thrust it into the fire. Muriel sprang to her feet, but he held her back.

'Grandpapa, that is mine. It is mine!'

Muriel lost self-control, and struggled to rescue the letter. The corners caught the blaze, and curled up slowly. Mr. Rivers' hands grasped her two wrists, and the muscles upon his own stood out like whip-cord. Aged as was he, passionate as was she, his strength mastered hers completely. He thrust her fiercely down into her chair—losing sight of his manliness.

'What are you thinking about? You forget yourself! You dare to resist!'

The letter was gone, save a few charred remains. Some fell to the hearth. Others, caught by the current of hot air, went up the chimney. Muriel sat trembling and subdued. No sound passed her white lips.

'I have told you before. Once for all, no letters shall come to this house from that man or his wife. You understand. Every letter that comes, goes behind the fire.'

Strange to say, Lilias had courage to observe, 'It might have been some important news.'

Mr. Rivers ignored the remark, and strode haughtily out of the room. Muriel looked crushed.

'I would not mind about it,' said Lilias quietly.

No answer. Muriel's breath came in laboured catches, and her face had grown livid. Lilias watched her closely.

'Poor dear Muriel!' she said at length.

Muriel started. She had forgotten her sister's presence.

'I would not mind so much,' said Lilias. 'It is not worth while.'

'The sin is worth minding.'

'Grandpapa was wrong,' said Lilias. 'But we can't help it.'

'No. *I* was wrong,' Muriel answered.

She rested her cheek on her hand, and fell into a muse—her troubled face growing slowly peaceful, even happy.

'What are you thinking?' Lilias asked.

'Only—that it is God's will,' said Muriel.

'Does that help you?'

'Yes—it does now. One has to learn to love His will.'

Lilias made no answer. Muriel lifted her head suddenly.

'I don't mean that my temper was God's will, Lilias. Only that if He sends the trouble about John and Rose, I have to accept it.'

Lilias might or might not have understood. She gave Muriel a kiss silently. Thereafter Muriel read aloud to her until Mrs. Bertram's return.

CHAPTER XXI.

WITNESSING.

'ABSURD! Ridiculous nonsense!' said Mr. Rivers. The words met Muriel, on her return to the drawing-room, one evening after a brief absence. Three or four friends had come to dinner. Lilias was not present, but Mrs. Bertram, handsomely dressed, acted well the part of hostess, with untroubled brow.

Mr. Rivers sat upright and restless in his arm-chair. Opposite, upon the square ottoman, was a young man of low forehead, eagle nose, and complacent mien. Possibly he was amusing himself a little at the old gentleman's expense. Muriel had that impression, as she entered. Montgomery Maxwell was beside a table, holding open a book of prints, but listening. The two lady-guests were attentive also, despite Mrs. Bertram's efforts to engage them in conversation.

'Ridiculous,' repeated Mr. Rivers. 'There is a great deal too much of that sort of thing now. Never used to be. Absurd.' What manner of story it was that had roused his ire, Muriel could only guess from remarks generally.

'Very absurd,' assented the other. 'People ought to keep their conscience in their pockets. Unpleasant to have it flaunted in one's face.'

'Conscience! People follow their own fancies and call that conscience. Everything goes down to conscience nowadays. Religion is put altogether into the wrong place.'

'It would be worth while to have the right place defined,' remarked the young man lazily. 'Just for the sake of

ɜnce—and as a matter of interest. Don't think I
ıgreeing with you.'
right place for it is where it was kept in *my* young
id Mr. Rivers with sternness. 'Religion is a matter
, not words. It ought to be kept in the background
its effects manifest. People did not then throw
authority and call that religion.'
-undoubtedly,' assented the young man.
: religion consists in providing for the poor and
s,' said Mr. Rivers. 'That is what the Bible itself
. Pure religion is providing for the needy.'
Mr. Rivers troubled himself very little about the
d needy or the fatherless—quite as little as the
ıan opposite troubled himself about religion. He
ɔscriptions sometimes, however—when he had not
ɜd with those who asked them of him.
· true. A good definition,' said the young man.
hy sensible view of the question.'
ɜl was about to speak, and found herself forestalled.
precisely the Bible view, however,' said Mr. Maxwell,
ɔmposure which veiled the greatness of the effort—
felt it. '"Pure religion and undefiled before God
Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in
iction."'
isely what I said,' observed Mr. Rivers, giving the
amazed look, for this was unwonted boldness on his
What should I visit for except to relieve? If I prefer
a five-pound note by somebody else, it comes to
ɜ thing.'
personal sympathy would be wanting,' said Mr.
Rivers never did send five-pound notes, or one-
otes either, in such a fashion; but the question did
e there.
: is religion,' said Mr. Rivers decisively. 'Give me
ractically useful to his fellow-men. That is religion.

Give me one that provides hospitals for the sick. That is religion. Cant is not religion.'

'Perfectly true,' said the young man. 'I have the greatest imaginable horror of cant.'

'So have I,' said Montgomery. 'Still, we are looking at the half only of that verse. "Pure religion . . . is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction—and—to keep himself unspotted from the world."'

Mr. Rivers' moustaches curled and writhed. The young man watched him with amused eyes, and asked the tutor lightly, 'What do you understand by that expression, "the world?" It has a rather vague sound.'

'That which is not distinctly "of Christ," is "of the world." All who are not "with Him" are "against Him." *Then* they are part of "the world."'

Gravely and quietly he spoke. It was a new phase of the man. Muriel knew this to be the outcome of wrestling prayer—knew it plainly as if she had seen him on his knees an hour before. Mr. Rivers looked wrathful.

'Mr. Rivers and I must be dangerous company for good people,' said the young man, with a slight shrug. 'Something contaminating about us, eh?'

The motion of Montgomery's head might have been assent, might have been dismissal of the subject, might have been unconscious. He went back to his book without a word. Remarks were brewing in another quarter, but before Mr. Rivers had decided what to say, a servant entered, bearing a small salver with a letter.

'For you, sir,' she said to Mr. Rivers. 'It was left, to be given to you immediately.'

Muriel knew in a moment that the note came from Bushby Rectory. She could not tell why or how. Instinct served in the place of sight, for she was too far off to distinguish the handwriting.

Mr. Rivers took it up, frowned, walked across the room, and dropped the unopened envelope into the fire.

Do you treat many of your correspondents in that sum-
y fashion, Mr. Rivers?' asked his much-entertained guest.
There are some whose communications are beneath
ıtion,' said the old man haughtily.
\h—begging epistles, yes. One is fairly pestered with
sort of trash.'
r. Rivers condescended to give no manner of explana-
Muriel felt sick at heart. A longing for fresh air
: over her, and presently she escaped into the dining-
ı, taking her stand at the outer conservatory door, where
ɔl breeze swept round her. Suddenly a figure appeared
behind.
luriel! You here?'
ınd you, Mr. Maxwell!'
thought I would make my escape this way.'
\h, you don't like front-doors. Have you said good-
ɒ'
'es. One of the ladies made a move—and I saw that
Rivers had had enough of me.'
ontgomery stood looking into the moonlight, which
: in a silver flood over the garden, casting dark elm-
ɔws upon the grass, and glittering through the glass of
onservatory. Full-flowering plants rose in dark tiers on
r side, with colours faintly distinguishable. Muriel, in
ss of transparent black and maize, statue-like in still-
had a certain sombre gravity of look. Montgomery
:lf was calm. He had signed the warrant that evening
:vering of most dear ties; yet he knew they needed to
vered, and the battle had been fought out beforehand.
ad the victory.
'hat is the matter?' he could ask quietly of her.
ɔmething is wrong at the Rectory,' she said.
:ow do you know?'
hat letter—you saw, did you not? One came a few
ago. They would not write so often without reason.
:re no way of finding out?'

He made no answer. Muriel clasped her hands together.

'Mr. Maxwell, how could I bear it, if anything happened to John? And I am not there—not able to help.'

'You do not know that anything is wrong.'

'I don't feel any doubt.'

'No need to make trouble till it comes. But you may be right, possibly. I will try to find out. I must not give needless offence by going myself to the Rectory. Banishment is likely to come soon enough without that.'

'Banishment! Not of you?'

'Did you not see that I caused annoyance? But it must be so. It is right. It is well.'

'Oh no—not to have more divisions,' said Muriel sorrowfully. 'There are quarrels enough.'

'Two are needed to make a quarrel, and I will not be one of the two. But he may forbid you to hold intercourse with me, as with John.'

'Not for those few words.'

'It is not unlikely.'

Muriel turned her head away, but pain was too sharp to be kept down.

'How long is this kind of thing to go on?' she asked. 'Everything is going. I shall have nothing left soon.'

'If God wills—so it must be.'

'You don't know—it isn't so much to you,' she said, not knowing the calm of heart-break which was his. 'You don't lose all—and you are free.'

Was he so? She did not know of his shackles.

'I am losing everything,' she repeated. 'John and Rose are cut off from me. Sibyl and uncle Chesney soon will be. Lilias is sinking—don't think I can't see it—dying! And you—you too are leaving. But I will not be denied speaking to you and Mrs. Maxwell.'

'If he forbids, you will obey. Coming to our house is no paramount duty with you,' said Mr. Maxwell.

'Duty! Ah, if you had not drilled me in as you have done, I must have broken loose long ago. Why can't I go to live with John and Rose? How they would welcome me!'

'Does God's providence point there for you?'

Muriel sighed heavily.

'You see your place is here. You have no right whatever to break the ties with which God has bound you. Your mother has the first right to you.'

'She does not care for the right.'

'My dear child, she does not repudiate it,' said Montgomery mildly. He was not thinking of self. His whole mind was bent to a most single-hearted consideration of her position. 'If it pleases God to take Lilias, you will be all that is left to her.'

'I am nothing to her,' said Muriel, with falling tears.

'You may be more. It is impossible to foresee, but I believe things will be different some day. However I do not expect that your obedience will be put to the test as regarding ourselves.'

'You think he will forbid us to meet.'

'He may—probably will. I do not know. But if he does I cannot stay in Claverton.'

'Not in Claverton!' she said, dismayed.

'No. It would be too painful. And—I have reasons.'

'But your house?'

'I gave provisional notice last quarter.'

'Why?' she asked, in surprise.

'I thought it would come to this. I did not know when. Strange, how hard the speaking-out has looked beforehand—yet so easy at the moment. I marvelled at the help given me.'

'You have not spoken out to-day, because of anything I once said?' she inquired, struck with a sudden fear.

'No—but because it was needful. As a servant of Christ, my livery must be worn. You first helped to open my eyes; but I have thought and prayed much since. It has been a

struggle. I have known so well all that it would
But I have counted the cost, and you and I must be
to have matters thus. It is best and wisest in the
alone shall suffer, and that is my comfort.'

Muriel did not see it so. Life looked heavy to
then. She found anything of cheerful acceptance a
matter.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISMISSAL.

THE storm threatening held off for three days. Mr. Maxwell came and went as usual. Also he was as ever silent and retiring, showing no inclination to bring on discussions. But there was a touch of leave-taking in his look at times, and he seemed to Muriel to be gathering up a store of recollections. Mr. Rivers' manner to him was brusque in the extreme. That was borne submissively, but matters could not rest there.

Montgomery had never fought a sorer fight than through those three days. For he now realised somewhat of his power over Muriel. He felt that a few free words on his part might be not unlikely to arouse such feelings on hers as would be sweet past expression to him. But he refrained. In honour towards Mr. Rivers, and in love towards Muriel, his words were guarded. No tone or look showed him to her as other than the kind and fatherly tutor. She had thought of him in no other light, and he abstained from giving just that touch which might have changed the whole aspect of affairs. Unselfish, aye, noble in self-conquest, was Montgomery. Not all men in his position would have acted thus.

'I think the trouble is passing off,' Muriel said to him hopefully on the third day. It was afternoon, and he had just entered the hall. 'Don't look so anxious. Clouds do sometimes blow over, you know.'

Mr. Maxwell knew better. He had marked too closely the old gentleman's bearing towards himself.

'You think it is premature that the offer of a tutorship abroad has reached me,' he said, with a sad smile.

'Abroad! O that would never do.'

His face did not show assent to this.

'You will decline it, of course,' she said earnestly.

'The answer need not be sent for a few days. We shall soon see.'

'O but in any case—you could not go abroad. It is too far from us all.'

He stood quietly looking into vacancy. It was hard to meet her frank unconsciously-affectionate look. Thorough Roger Ascham he had been to her, but she was more than Lady Jane to him.

'However, I was not thinking about that when I came in,' he said. 'I am sorry to bring you bad news, Muriel. John is ill.'

'John! I knew it.'

'He has something of low fever. Don't be over-anxious. It may prove to be nothing. The attack has evidently been coming on for some time past.'

'Poor Rose!' Muriel's eyes were full.

'It will be all well. Everything will be well.'

'He will die!' she said huskily. 'It will be the judgment on——'

'Hush! Don't finish saying that. You and I have not to pronounce judgment. Better to pray for both.'

'It might be so. What would grandpapa feel if John died? O John!' and she went restlessly to the end of the hall and back. 'O John—I don't know how to bear it! He has been better than brother to me, Mr. Maxwell.'

'I know it.'

'And now—not to be with him——'

'A way for that may open. Mr. Rivers may soften.'

'I'll go to tell him myself. Have you no more particulars to give me.'

'Nothing much. The illness seems to be rather severe

kind, but danger not a present thing. He may rally soon. 'e must hope the best. Shall I speak to Mr. Rivers for ›u ?'

'O no—don't you do anything.'

She went impetuously to the study. It was one of those :casions when she had better have delayed for a few inutes of prayer and thought. Unguarded words were to ɛ dreaded. With the one idea in her mind she hastened ›ay, knocked at the door, and entered.

'What is the matter ?' demanded Mr. Rivers, in his sharp ;yle.

Muriel came and stood at the table, flushed and excited. ſr. Rivers sat back in his deep arm-chair, having a book ropped against his knee, and a fire blazing beside him. He ›ulled his spectacles lower on his nose, and looked keenly ›ver them at his granddaughter.

'Well ?'

'Grandpapa, John is ill.'

'John who ?'

'Our John.'

'I have nothing to do with John Rivers,' was the cold reply.

'He is very ill,' repeated Muriel. 'It is low fever, and ıe may soon be in danger. The letters must have been ıbout that.'

'Possibly. You may go,' said Mr. Rivers, and his eyes eturned to his book.

'Grandpapa, may I see John ?'

'No.'

'I must, if he becomes worse.'

'You will do as you are told. Leave the room.'

'If John were dying, would you not see him ?' she asked.

Mr. Rivers gazed steadily at his book. Whether he read line of it is another question.

'He will long for a kind word from you. It was bad nough when he was well, but now I don't know how he will ›ear to have you keeping away. Grandpapa, it may help to

kill him,' she said feverishly. 'Think what it would be if he died, and you had not seen him. If he gets worse I must go.'

'You will go simply where I allow you to go.'

'But you will let me write to him and to Rose? O it is so wrong—so very very wrong!' she said passionately, as the face before her grew harder. 'And John has done nothing which can be blamed. It is so wrong.'

'In your opinion. Enough of this! Who told you anything about it?'

'The news came in a roundabout way.'

'Claverton gossip. Rubbish. Who repeated it to you? Tell me at once. I choose to know.'

Delay would have made matters worse. 'Mr. Maxwell mentioned it——' she began.

'Send Mr. Maxwell here, and don't come back yourself.'

Muriel tried to resist—tried to defend Mr. Maxwell. She was cut short, and ordered away.

Waiting anxiously in the hall to learn results, she found Arthur presently by her side, and told him all that had happened. Half-an-hour passed, and the murmur of voices one low, one raised, within the study—rarely ceased. Then the door opened, and Mr. Rivers strode out.

'What are you both doing here?' he demanded. 'Go to the drawing-room immediately.'

They had to obey. No more was seen of Montgomery Maxwell that day.

Mr. Rivers was unwell next morning, and did not appear to breakfast. Agitating scenes shook the old man more than they had once done. His will was strong as ever, but the body grew weaker, and infirmities were gaining hold upon him.

He had Mrs. Bertram into his room for a few minutes, and she came to breakfast with a cloud on her fair face.

'I could not have believed you to be so foolish, Muriel,' she said.

'As what?' Muriel asked.

to do what you have done. I do not know precisely
ɔu said last night, but you have certainly displeased
andfather very seriously.'
el thought it did not take much to do that.
Maxwell is not coming to the house again.'
ur turned pale, and Muriel exclaimed.
your grandfather says. He has dismissed him. Mr.
ll has acted very foolishly. He might have known it
t for his interest to talk about religion in this house.'
iel had no doubt about his realisation of that fact.
ely grandpapa has not sent him away offhand?' said
in a constrained tone.
will not come to the house again. Your grandfather
e that distinctly—several times.'
t because of those few words the other evening?
r, this is disgraceful!'
. Maxwell talked in the same style yesterday too. For
t, I think him very interfering and very wrong,' said
ertram. 'He might just as well have allowed things
ɔn smoothly. What could he possibly gain by making

thing for himself,' said Muriel, while Arthur sat, look-
nned.
r for any one else. No good is ever done by this sort
g. I thought Mr. Maxwell had more sense. It is
ıconvenient—just when Arthur was getting on so well.
ıll have to find a new tutor, but it is a disadvantage
a few months before he goes to college. I wish
would act sensibly.'
ıur left his breakfast half-eaten and vanished, fairly
ɔme. Muriel said as little as possible till breakfast was
end, then rushed up to her own room, threw on her
g things, and hastened out of the house.
rcourse was not as yet forbidden. That would doubt-
ɔme next. She was free still, though not without a
of doubt. Would her grandfather allow this, if he

knew it? Muriel would not stop to weigh that question. She soon reached the Maxwells' door.

The servant admitted her directly, though breakfast was not quite over. Muriel found mother and son seated at the table. And, behold—Arthur had forestalled her.

'What, Muriel too?' said Mr. Maxwell.

'It isn't forbidden,' said Muriel, with a sorrowful smile, bending over the old lady. And some tears dropped from the sightless eyes of the one, and the dark eyes of the other. For Mrs. Maxwell had been a kind old friend to her, of long standing.

'It is hard to bear,' said Muriel.

'No—not hard,' Montgomery answered. 'Children, I don't know what to say to you both. How would Mr. Rivers approve of this?'

'It doesn't matter,' said Arthur hardily. 'I *will* come and see you.'

'No. Not against orders. No doing of evil that good may come. But the order has not been given yet. Not yet,' repeated Montgomery thoughtfully. 'I thought he meant that yesterday, but he may even have relented. It is not likely. Well, sit down, both of you. Our last time together, perhaps.'

Muriel looked at him in surprise. She had not expected this cheerfulness.

'Sometimes one is borne through trial better than one expects,' he said. 'The dark time may come after. But the same Hand bears one through that also.'

'If it were only not my doing!' said Muriel.

'It is not. I was in the wrong, and needed a reproof. The lesson must have come to me for my good, in one way or another. God used you to open my eyes. He could have used any other means as well, with the same result. Well, we have had pleasant years of work and friendship together. We may have others by-and-by—or we may not. We must meet in heaven.'

'How can I get there, without you to guide me?' Arthur asked, in choked tones. Poor boy! the blow was a sore one to him. His eyes were red with scarcely-restrained tears.

'The Prince of Israel will be thy guide. Only trust Him.'

Mr. Maxwell looked thoughtfully out of the window for some seconds.

'Children, it is our Father's will. I am willing. Are not you?'

Muriel lifted her eyes to his, and said steadfastly, 'Yes.'

'But you will not go abroad?' pleaded Arthur.

'I think so. There are reasons which render it desirable. My mother agrees with me.'

'But what will Mrs. Maxwell do?'

'She will say "Yes," like the voice she heard just now,' the old lady quietly answered. 'It is sorrowful work, Muriel, but I see the need.'

'Why? I don't understand. Why not have another tutorship in England?'

'I have a mind for two or three years abroad. My dear mother will stay with her sisters during my absence. Afterwards I hope to settle down again in England with her.'

'In Claverton?' brother and sister exclaimed.

'Probably not. No need to look forward.'

And they spent the morning together, for he could not resolve to send them away. The farewell at last was a tearful affair. Yet Muriel felt peaceful.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SICKNESS.

ONE afternoon a railway cab drove to the door, and Chesney Rivers sprang out. He left his bag on the seat, told the driver to wait, and strode into the house. The first person whom he came across was his sister. They met in the hall, and she started back in surprise. Her dainty frills were not often ruffled by so hasty a movement.

'How do you do, Mary? Where is my father?'

'In his study. You did not send us word that you were coming.'

'I didn't know it myself till this morning. John is worse.'

'How did you hear? Are you sure?'

'Rose wrote me word. She has been making little of the attack for Sibyl's sake, and we had no notion how ill he was. Things look bad now. I have come off by the first train.'

'You don't mean that he is in actual danger?'

'It is not hopeless.'

'I don't know whether papa will be pleased to have you here. He was very much displeased at your visiting Constance.'

'No end to the fancies,' said Chesney curtly. 'I am out of patience with the whole concern. He shall not banish me, at all events. He is in his room, you say?'

As if in answer, the study door opened, and Mr. Rivers came slowly out. No sign of welcome showed in his face. The lines imprinted there seemed suddenly to deepen and

;row hard. Chesney's hand went out frankly, but met with touch instead of a grasp.

'I have come to see John,' he said. 'Do you know how l the poor fellow is?'

No answer, beyond a stern bracing up of the aged figure.

'Rose's account is very sad. His strength seems to have one down fearfully, and last night he was thought to be nking—the night before last, I mean. He may be even worse ow. Not typhoid—no infection—only low fever from over-rain. He never was robust. They say that in delirium he lks of you incessantly. You will come and see him, father?'

Mr. Rivers' features had turned to a grey whiteness, and is very limbs looked rigid—whether with distress or anger hesney knew not. The answer was a brief—'No.'

'He may be dying. It is impossible to say. Accounts e very bad. Can you willingly throw away what may be ur last chance of seeing John?'

Mr. Rivers turned sharply, and went into his study, bang-ig the door after him. Chesney opened it, and stood hold-ig the handle.

'I beg your pardon, father, but——'

'Will you be so good as to leave me alone?'

'One moment. I intend to take Muriel with me. She is eded, and John might be the better for seeing her. I have t spoken to Muriel yet, so the responsibility is mine. You fuse John the greater comfort, but he shall have the lesser.' And Chesney shut the door—with something of a bang mself, for his generous blood was stirred within him.

'He will be fearfully angry if Muriel does go,' said Mrs. rtram.

'Can't help that. We must risk it. Rose is done up, and eds Muriel's help, and John must have her. Where is she?' Not far distant, or hard to find. A few minutes were ough for explanation, and Muriel flew upstairs, to thrust a r necessaries into a small bag, While so doing, Lilias came tly in. Her step was never active now.

'I hope John will soon be better,' she said. 'It will be a great pleasure for you to be among them all, Muriel.'

'Yes. I shall be thinking of you, though;' and the words came naturally.

'Not when you have John and Rose.'

'Yes.'

Muriel turned the key in the small padlock, rose from her stooping posture, and shook out her dress.

'If I want more things they can be sent. Let me know how you are, Lilias. I may be there some days, you see.'

'Or weeks,' suggested Lilias. 'But what will grandpapa say?'

'I don't know. Uncle Chesney has settled all that. No need for us to look forward,' said Muriel, resisting the heart-sinking which assailed her. 'John may get better very quickly. Only let me know often how you are.'

That was all they had time for. Chesney was very impatient to be off. Possibly he had a fear of interference on the part of his father, but Mr. Rivers remained hidden. No one saw him again throughout the rest of that day. At dinner-time he refused to be present, and when Mrs. Bertram went to his locked door, she was ordered away.

Meanwhile Muriel sat beside her uncle, hearing particulars, so far as he was acquainted with them. She had suffered from almost a dearth of news during the last week.

John had been gradually getting worse, ever since Chesney and Sibyl left the house; but Rose, hoping always for improvement, and hardly realising the serious nature of the illness, could not bear to distress Sibyl, while still so poorly.

'It seems she tried to open communication with my father and failed,' said Chesney. 'I don't think Rose took alarm till three or four days ago. This morning's letter is in an anxious strain altogether—and it takes a good deal to make Rose anxious. She wrote it late at night, and the morning postscript says—where is it?—she crosses her sheet about so confusedly—ah, here! "A very bad night. John much

orse. Less delirium, but extreme weakness. Once we ought he was sinking. He has rallied somewhat since en, but I am afraid it is no real improvement." But you ll like to read the whole letter.'

'Did you tell grandpapa all this?'

'Why, no. He would not listen to me. Besides, my chief ncern was to get you off safely. When I have seen John, I n try my hand again upon my father. But he is hard to move.'

Muriel thought of John's words—'If I were dying you ight come to me at all hazards, I think.' She looked out the window, unable to speak.

'What is all this about Maxwell?' asked Chesney sud-nly.

'He is forbidden the house.'

'He too! Who next?' Secretly Chesney was not sorry r Muriel's sake, though vexed for Montgomery.

'He gave offence. There was no real reason. Grand-pa can't stand a word about religion.'

'And Maxwell went against his will. I didn't know the or fellow had pluck for that.'

'There is much more force of character in him than ap-ars at first sight.'

'No doubt—though you don't call mine a first sight of n, I hope. Tell me how it all happened.'

Muriel obeyed, finding some diversion for her own thoughts doing so.

'My father seems to rejoice in fresh faces. And Maxwell eally going abroad?'

'Very soon. I don't know exactly when, but he is just ving Claverton. Why he goes abroad I can't imagine. seems to look upon it as a duty, in some mysterious way.'

'He has his own reasons, of course. You will all find n a loss.'

'O yes, indeed. He has been a father to me, and to thur. What should I have done without him?'

Chesney was satisfied with the frankly-expressed regrets

and unconscious manner. The less said thereafter on that particular subject the better, he thought. They drove in silence till the Rectory was reached.

Rose came swiftly downstairs with outstretched hands and haggard look, having caught the sound of carriage-wheels. She threw herself into Muriel's arms.

'O this is good—this is a comfort,' she said. 'I did not dare to hope for so much. Chesney, how kind of you—how dear of Sibyl to spare you! And grandpapa consented to our having Muriel?'

'He didn't forbid it,' said Chesney, with a slight shrug. 'How is John?'

'Very sadly. Just now conscious and easy—but he is up one hour and down the next. He wants to know who it is that has come.'

'Then he notices things?'

'Sometimes—not always.'

'Rose, you want help in the nursing,' said Muriel.

'I never leave him except when he makes me—but we have a nurse. I can't stay away now. Will you have something to eat before you see John? I must tell him you are here.'

Little telling seemed to be needed. Muriel was speedily summoned into the shaded bedroom, and John's burning fingers closed round hers for a moment, only to unloose instantly. She would hardly have recognised John in the wasted figure, bound by weakness as by iron bands. He lifted his eyes to hers, with a faint smile, and then the lids drooped again. It was not the greeting Muriel had expected.

'He is so tired,' Rose said sadly.

Muriel saw his lips move, and bent lower.

'Grandfather——' he said.

'Quite well, John.'

'And Lilias?'

'Much the same.'

'Sibyl——'

'Better than she was—is she not, uncle?'

'Much,' Chesney answered. 'John, you must improve it.'

The same flitting smile crossed his face.

'So good of you both to come.'

'O no, John, only a pleasure,' said Muriel.

John made no answer. He lay with half-closed eyes, breathing heavily, like one exhausted.

'How long has he been in this state?' Chesney inquired of Rose.

'Two or three days—not more, I think. The delirium is more constant before. He wanders still a good deal, but just now he knows you both.' She spoke in a whisper.

'Would he not always?'

Rose shook her head. John presently said distinctly—

'Rose must lie down.'

'Not now, John dear. I can't.'

'Muriel——' he said appealingly.

'She shall. I will make her,' said Muriel.

'Thank you.'

The promise was one difficult to fulfil, but Muriel had her way at length. Having safely disposed of Rose in another room, she came back to find Chesney seated by the bed, listening intently. John was saying,—

'You'll see to Rose?'

'Yes, my dear fellow—only don't worry yourself.'

'No. But if I don't get well—she will need——'

'Yes, I understand. I quite understand. Only you are going to get well, so no need to talk over particulars.'

'As God wills.'

'Yes—just so. Why, you are a degree better already, I think—not so feverish.'

'I am very weak. It will be as God wills,' the quiet faint voice said.

The nurse interposed, and checked further talk. Chesney

went away, while Muriel sat to watch and think. How strange it would be if John were taken in the height of his noonday usefulness! John taken, to be so sorely missed—and the old grandfather allowed to remain on year after year, a comfort and blessing to none. What a contrast, the thirty years of the one, the eighty years of the other! Then she remembered the story of the barren fig-tree, the vainly expected fruit, and the solemn decision allowing but one year more. One year more, or one month more, or one week more! It might be that for John—but he was ready. His had been no barren fig-tree's life.

As evening drew on John's silent feebleness was exchanged for feverish restlessness, with pain and wandering. To lie still for a moment seemed impossible, and he talked incessantly, though in tones so low that words were not always easy to distinguish. 'Grandfather' was an oft-repeated sound, coming mechanically, perhaps. Muriel stood holding his hands, bathing his head, changing his pillow,—doing everything she could think of to soothe his suffering. She doubted whether he knew her, but after a while, with a moan she caught the sound of 'Muriel.'

'So much pain, dear John?' she asked. 'Is it your head?'

'So weary. If I could but rest.'

Yet the next instant he looked up, smiling, and said, 'Rejoice evermore—evermore.'

'Yes, John. I will indeed—if only you will get better.'

'I!'—and a curiously peaceful look crossed the face, so tried a moment before. 'That will not last. It does not touch the "light" and "gladness."'

His mind wandered away again, and the suffering restlessness came back, but she could hear him murmuring broken to himself, '"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!" "Be glad, rejoice—shout for joy, all ye—upright in heart." "Rejoice in the Lord—in the Lord—O ye righteous." "Rejoice in every good thing"—"evermore—evermore."'

l so on, again and again, till Muriel would have given
ng to check him, but he was unconscious of her
ce, and would not be checked. By-and-by he
:d off to the subject of his children, and talked
ly of each by name, returning thence to the never-
matter of his grandfather's displeasure.
you could bring us together, you know—things might
ter. Muriel—is that you? Not Rose?'
ıse will come soon. Don't you know me, John?'
:s, you understand—you understand, Muriel. I can't
into Rose's mind somehow. That would be—would
ıe wisest plan. What was I saying?—something
—about grandfather. My head is so confused,' he
looking anxiously at Muriel, with his pain-worn eyes.
t you think there may be forgetfulness? So long since
:t—and he was so cold. I think sometimes—coming
er, you know. I am so tired, Muriel—dead tired—I
explain. Don't you understand? The old feeling
rousing. Yes, that was what I wanted to say. If I
have—could have—just a few—you know—words—a
-it would do me good—him I mean.'
:s, but don't talk so much, John,' said Muriel, for he
d to be struggling with overpowering weakness.
must—I have things to say—messages. Only every-
goes from me. Chesney tried and failed—so sad,
It takes a long long time—hard to move. And he—
ıappy—can't be happy. It makes one sick at heart,
l.'
the evening and the night went by, but not without
turns than these.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EXPLANATION.

NEARLY a week had passed, and matters stood at much the same level. John was no better, yet not materially worse. There was greater weakness, and less fever. He might rally yet, but he was as one bearing onwards for the shores of the dark river.

'You must come in the garden with me,' Chesney said to Muriel one afternoon. 'You are getting to look ill yourself.'

'O no, nothing makes me ill.'

'Something might—don't boast too soon. Come, I want a little talk.'

He caught up a shawl peremptorily, threw it round her, and would take no denial.

It was an autumn day, sober-toned, soft and mild. Dry leaves fluttered down, and lay about the paths, while the beds were still bright with flowers. Subdued chirpings came from the trees around, quietly content in tone, but lacking the exuberance of spring rejoicings.

'How about the last three hours?' Chesney inquired, as they paced slowly the gravel walk, Muriel leaning on his arm.

'John says nothing. I think he is much weaker than he has been yet.'

'Poor fellow! Poor dear fellow!'

'Sometimes he gives Rose a word or a smile, but not often. He only cares to lie quiet. Rose keeps up wonderfully.'

ys was buoyant. She builds a good deal on the
; of the feverish symptoms.
if he has strength to battle through. I don't know
hink,' said Muriel sadly.
t be desponding. I don't give up hope at all. In
own belief is that he will go lower still before he
corner. Just been to the Manor—but there is no
ıe old gentleman here.'
he not seem to care?'
!—he is skin and bone. I never saw a man more
Looks ghastly. But he holds out—bull-dog sort
ty. "John Rivers is nothing to him." Nothing!
: poor old man's heart is breaking for John! I de-
.'
ey choked, and had to pause.
ıess!' he broke out suddenly. 'What is it all for?
; no one—himself least of all. Why can't he give
ıst because he has said he won't, I suppose. Well,
can't bend, though it may break. Will he go on

did you say to him?' asked Muriel.
'thing I could think of. Described John's state—
:tors' opinions—told him how John talked of his
—asked how he would feel if—the worst came. He
ilence me, but I was determined not to be silenced.
refuge in his study, and I followed him. I stuck to
had said all I wanted to say. Not a bit of good.
ling process may be going on below—but if it
:ach the surface till too late——'
ame involuntarily. A moment later he added,
: I expect the worst.'
does not. I think I do,' said Muriel in an under-

it and watch in that room till you get low-spirited.
; have you been there to-day?'
hours. Uncle, did you see Lilias?'

'Yes, poor girl. Strange how persistently Mary ignores all notion of danger in that direction.'

'Does she?'

'Why, has she ever allowed it with you?'

'Yes—only once.'

'Ah—poor Mary! Then she does understand. That explains her unhappy look now and then.'

'Lilias is everything to mamma.'

Muriel stopped short, and looked up in his face, seized by a sudden impulse.

'I wish you would tell me why it is that mamma feels as she does about me. I know you must have heard.'

'And you never did?'

'No, but I think I have a right to know. If it is a secret, I will not repeat it. I would much rather understand. It might help me to bear her manner.'

'Don't think too much of that. You women put manner off and on at will.'

'It is not off and on. She is always the same to me.'

'Better than fickleness! However, Lilias has been her pet from babyhood.'

'But may I not know why? There is a reason, is there not?'

'Yes. I don't know why I should not tell you—only keep it to yourself.'

'Some family disgrace?' she asked, flushing. 'But what could that have to do with me apart from others?'

'Not exactly that. Your mother counts it a disgrace, but then she is very sensitive on the score of "blue blood," and "sixteen quarterings." We are well-connected. I don't myself undervalue position or descent—still one may make too much of such things.'

'You are giving me a long preface,' said Muriel, looking uneasy.

'I am forgetting. The long and short of the matter is that your grandmother on the Bertram side was a half-caste.'

le let Muriel have leisure to digest the idea, and was sed to see that her mind had wandered off to something

What now?' he asked.
Hush!—I thought I heard Connie calling.'
Connie is too prudent a little person to make a noise.'
Fancy, I suppose. Rose said she should not want me in hour. Well, uncle?'
You know now,' he said.
Know what?'
That which I told you just now.'
O, I see—yes—I was thinking of poor John,' she said a sigh.
Mind, it is a secret. I don't believe your mother would appy to live on in Claverton, if she supposed the fact e generally known.'
But, uncle, you were going to tell me why mamma feels he does about me.'
That is it. Don't you see? You inherit a certain ething in the way of feature and manner, which prevents r mother from ever losing sight of the grand trial of her

Losing papa must have been that,' said Muriel gravely. t she hardly ever speaks of papa. Why not? I have dered sometimes.'
She never quite got over this.'
Papa could not help it.'
No, but he did not tell her. She married him very young, when she reached India, this fact coming out unexpect- was a great blow to her pride. It made her miserable.'
Did papa not show it in his face?'
He was very dark and handsome—but the Eastern look not strike one in him as it does in you. Besides, such dea never occurred to us.'
I can't help my looks,' said Muriel. 'The thing itself s not affect me any more than Lilias.'

'No. But your face is a carrying on of your mother's trouble.'

The walk became silent for a while.

'What made my grandfather marry her?' asked Muriel.

'Marry a half-caste! She was beautiful, and he thought her attractive. They say he was an impulsive man, never looking ahead. Such things occasionally happen.'

'And mamma counts it such a disgrace that she can't love me—only on that account!'

'I have no doubt she does love you, but you bring up uncomfortable feelings—unavoidably. She counts the whole thing a disgrace. Any manner of connection with those beneath her in rank would be a serious trial to your mother—and this most of all.'

'I think family quarrels are much more of a disgrace.'

'You have not been in India, or you would better understand her feeling. I am not defending her—but still——'

'I don't understand it now. I don't,' repeated Muriel gravely, with a slight flush. 'It seems to me unimportant. She might feel vexation and disappointment on first hearing it. But to carry on such a feeling for a life-time—to dislike her child for it——'

'No, not dislike.'

'You don't know—you don't see all.'

'Your mother judges of the weight of such matters by the position they hold in the eyes of the world,' said Chesney.

'But then I don't take my stand as a woman of the world.'

Chesney smiled slightly.

'Still I am glad I know. So many things are clear to me now, that used to be a puzzle. Will mamma never forgive me my dark skin, do you think?'

'Hard to say. Try to make her.'

'How can I? I can't touch this, you see. It can't be done away. Only, knowing the reason will make her manner easier to bear.'

you sure that your manner does not try her?' asked
y suddenly. 'Is it all on one side?'
manner!' Muriel was very much surprised. 'My
ways?'
; simply your manner to her.'
d not know I was to blame.'
l, I don't settle the question for you. It might be
ɔoking into.'
ı't you explain what you mean?' she asked.
ɨ not think the coldness was entirely on one side.'
how can I help that? She always checks me.'
cks what? Advances on your part?'
ɛl hesitated. 'She used to do so. I have not tried

weeks or months?'
rs,' was the honest answer. Muriel blushed at her
ıfession.
I dare say not. The fact is, Lilias' gentleness com-
ith—forgive me!—with your brusquerie towards your
partly explains her feeling. I am a blunt fellow,
This is an ill-chosen time for fault-finding.'
ɔuld rather know the truth,' Muriel said with blinded
'I never thought of such a thing. Mamma has always
ɔld to me ever since I can remember.'
need for you to be cold to her in return. You have
ɔf winning power, as we all know. Why not *make*
ɛ you?'
el glanced silently over past years, and knew that the
was a deserved one. She had too fully accepted her
ɔsition as unloved daughter of the house, falling in
e notion, and acting back accordingly. Words and
f affection on her own part had been studiously re-
l. Why needed they to have been, unless under
ɛe of pride?
ɛ had crept in, undoubtedly. If Mrs. Bertram showed
e for her, she would show no love back. If Mrs.

Bertram did not care for Muriel's presence, Muriel would hold aloof. These had been her rules of action.

'I never meant to be stiff to mamma,' she said. 'But I see I have been.'

'You are a girl worth giving a hint to,' said Chesney. 'Wise folks will always learn.'

'I hope things will be different when I go home,' Muriel answered soberly. And then they went back to thoughts of John.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CRISIS.

RE are iron natures which may be crushed or broken, vhich will not bend beneath the strongest pressure. Yet ıer mode lies open. For the mass of cold unyielding upon which the mighty steam-hammer shall be used in can be moulded with ease into shape—after the furnace

:. Rivers was entering into that furnace. Nay, he stood ılready. But the metal would not soften quickly. The had to be increased.

ł he deceive himself, any more than others, with the ,ht that he did not care?

sat alone one evening in his study. Rain pelted out- and the fire had burnt low, and the lights were dim. id not wish the room to look bright. He could do ıg. Books failed in interest. Letters were a disgust ı. John filled the horizon of his mind.

n! ah, how that simple name seemed to be burnt in his brain! John—once the pride of his heart. John e the delight of his life.

ł suppose now that John were not to recover!

Rivers groaned aloud, unknowingly. He sat leaning d, a listless broken man—his hands trembling, his ırched. The sound of his groan came back to his own He was almost startled. What, did he really care so ?

tried to think how John had offended him, how John

had crossed his will, how John had checked his purposes. It would not do. A pale reproachful face seemed to haunt him. He could not shake it off. He could not work up any genuine indignation. His heart was aching bitterly for a sight of John.

Yet when there sounded a decisive tapping at the door, the old man sat upright, stern and resolute once more. Give way! Confess himself wrong! Never!

Chesney came in, cloaked, grave, hat in hand.

'Father, I have driven over for a word with you. I want you to come back with me.'

Mr. Rivers met his eyes coldly.

'What for, if you please?'

'John is sinking. The doctors do not think he can live through the night.'

'Doctors are occasionally mistaken.'

'Would to God they may be so now!'

Chesney passed his hand across his face. The old man was trembling visibly.

'Unless this sinking can be arrested—and the doctors give almost no hope—John is dying.'

There was no reply.

'Father, you understand me? John is dying. He has asked for you—and you are coming to see him. Are you not?'

Dead silence continued. Mr. Rivers' face was rigid as steel.

'Will you refuse him his last wish? I don't ask you as to forgiveness. If you have anything to forgive, surely now is the time to put it aside. He may be gone before the morning. How would you feel if you knew that he had died, longing for one kind word from you—and that word denied him?'

An answer dropped slowly—hollow and sepulchral in tone—from Mr. Rivers' grey lips. 'I have told you before! John Rivers is my grandson no longer.'

'He is the son of your old age.'

'He is not.'

'He was,' said Chesney sadly.

have nothing to do with that.'
e is a sufferer, if no more. That alone is a claim.
l any humane man refuse another's dying wish—so
granted?'
lo not believe he is dying.'
ıd if you hear to-morrow that all is over——' No
r came.
ıve you at least no message to send him?'
ıave—not.'
ıd this is your final decision?'
:s.'
ıen may God forgive you!' said Chesney, with indig-
orrow hardly to be controlled. 'If this is the drop
ıch, and John dies where a word might help to save
vho will be to blame then?'
Rivers' head had sunk on his chest.
ill you not think better of it?' pleaded Chesney. 'To-
w may be too late. To-night is not. If John dies, you
:ver be happy again. What can you gain by holding
Forgiveness is noble. This is simply a misery to all.'
the iron was not yet fit for the welding. The shackles
le would not yield.
ave me,' said Mr. Rivers haughtily.
ıd you will not come?'
.'
ıe carriage is waiting. I told John I thought he would
u.'
ıt by my authority.'
ther, do come!' said Chesney earnestly.
. Go and leave me.'
sney sorrowfully withdrew, closing the door behind

:n the flood-tide of woe, held back so far by resolute
of will, broke through all barriers and rolled in upon
d man's heart. Once more alone, he sat bowed be-
the anguish of the yoke which he had put upon his

own neck. Verily the heavenly yoke is light and easy, while Satan loads his servants with grievous burdens.

'John dying—dying—dying!'

How the words echoed and rang through the air of the room! How they sounded in his ears, and thrilled through his brain, and wrung his soul with pain! Stern composure was at an end. He groaned, and rocked himself to and fro.

'John dying! John!'

He began to realise what this John was to him. Feeling had before been without realisation. A diorama of the past rolled slowly before his eyes.

Not an unbroken succession of pictures. Some parts were dim with the uncertainty of an aged memory. Some parts were blurred with passion. Other scenes stood forth, clear as daylight.

He seemed again to see the bright-haired boy bounding into this very room—coming and going unchecked, where no living person beside might venture without leave. John could never intrude. John could never be in the way. Once again he heard the joyous-toned voices which had been the very music of his life. Once again he seemed to see himself finding interest, happiness, sympathy, in that satisfying companionship. He had wanted nothing when John was near. John had seemed to want nothing when he was near. The two had been most closely bound together. John's marriage and settling into a home of his own had not shaken the bond. Something else was needed.

Something—but what else? Mr. Rivers, spending this hour in vivid memories of earlier days, found certain after events fading into nothing. What had John done, to cause such grievous offence? He had insisted on following the leading of his own conscience. Was that unreasonable? He had helped Muriel out of a difficulty. What of that?

Mr. Rivers could hold himself to no steady train of thought. He went back to the recollection of the bright face, the shining brown hair, the buoyant step, the merry

igh. How deadly silent the room was! Even the patter- of the rain had ceased. Not a murmur of sound was lible. Would John's voice ever ring through that house in? Such a cheery voice in health. But now—the voice failing, the eyes were dim.

John dying! My boy—John!'

he old man muttered the words heavily. He rose and t to the writing-table, in a mechanical way, supporting self by the backs of chairs, for he could scarcely stand. mall side drawer, carefully locked, was his aim. His king hands were slow to get it opened.

Within lay a knot of twine, and some dried daisies, curious nants of John's baby days. Also a small wooden box, n's first carpentering attempt, and three or four childish tches, and a packet of schoolboy letters. Mr. Rivers had been to this drawer for a very long time. He had wn the things were there, and he could not resolve to troy them, so he had just let them alone.

He took up a small roll of paper, and from it dropped a g fair curl. John had been such a pretty little boy. Mr. ers remembered the curls, and the ruffles, and the rosy eks, and his own pride in them all.

A morocco case was in the little collection. Mr. Rivers k that up, opened it, and looked at the photograph. n's own manly face met the gaze. John's frank brown s smiled pleasantly back into his.

A thick mist spread over his sight, and two reluctant tears heavily. For John was dying. The two had been parted g by the old man's will, but now that the parting threatened be final, apart from his own control, a change came. le, which alone had been stronger than love, yielded eath the furnace heat. Love, once more set free, sprang cely up, burning and melting the heart in which it had n so long buried from the light of day.

My boy John! What have I been about? John dying!

n DYING!'

A strong mania took possession of the old man. He walked to and fro with tottering footsteps, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. His eyes were dazzled, his thoughts wild. A heart-breaking anguish was upon him. What could he do? How could he bear it? John dying!—and he had refused to see John again—had refused to send one kind word!

He began to look upon things in their true light. He had some glimpses of his own evil temper and its evil work.

Forgiveness! There was nothing to forgive. It was he who stood in need of John's forgiveness! For the first time this was made clear to him.

The anguish deepened, till the old man felt as if he must almost die beneath it. His whole soul, set free from its pride-shackles, cried out in grief and distraction for John. He wanted nothing but John. He had no interest in life but John. From head to foot he was burning and throbbing with a devouring thirst for John. As the furnace-fire grew hotter, the man's frame was racked with sorrow of heart. What could he do? How should he bear it? The grief he had brought upon himself was past endurance. He had no helper.

'O God! O God!' The sound broke out at intervals, with gasps of woe. For men in deep extremity do commonly call upon God, however lightly they may reject Him and despise His love in easier days. Thus often they compel Him in very pity to plunge them into the furnace, simply that they may call upon Him. And Mr. Rivers, knowing practically nothing of prayer, in the helplessness of his deep distress took up the cry of so many, and moaned aloud, 'God help me! O God, help me!'

John dying—but not dead yet. That thought came to him suddenly. The morrow would be too late, but this evening was not.

His resolution was taken instantly, and acted upon without delay. Dizzied, distracted, half-blind, looking like a man demented, he staggered out of the study. He saw no one

he way. Mechanically taking his hat, he put it on, and
t forth alone into the darkness.

e never thought of the carriage. In his overwrought
, the delay of waiting for it would probably have been
pportable. Rain had ceased, and the clouds were clear-
way. He hurried on his way rapidly, with uncertain
, making no calculation as to the four miles' walk and
wn failing limbs. For John lay at the end of the four
s. John was his goal. No weakness might hinder his
nce.

ile after mile he went, stumbling and staggering often,
times almost falling, then gathering himself up to fresh
t.

hn might die .before he arrived. That thought ever
ed upon him, and urged him to speed. 'O John—my
I' was his mutter as he walked.

e knew the direction well enough. There was no need
ave the highway. No one passing recognised him, or
y did none ventured to speak. He saw nobody himself.
sion of a dying face lay before his eyes, and nothing
could come between. His keeping of the road was
ether mechanical. As the moon came out, the old man
ring along, with his faltering steps and white hair and
ge expression, must have had a weird look. He took
is hat after a while, that the night-breeze might cool his
ing head, and the loose white hair was tossed about in
reeze. But he never stopped. Onward and onward,
ing, staggering, and murmuring to himself—still he went
ing forward. Nothing checked him.

ne four miles came to an end at last, and the Rectory
eached. It was years since he had passed through this
He looked up at the house with dim eyes.

hich room was John's? How if all were over? He
t be too late.

nat question, awful in its uncertainty, was almost more
Mr. Rivers could bear. His head and hands shook

like the leaves of an aspen. 'John!' his quivering lips said 'John!' But no answer came. No one heard him.

He found the front door on the latch, and stumbled feebly in. The house was very still. A light burnt in the matted hall, where John had so often played with his boys. No games to-night. A dark dread came over the heart of the old man. John must surely be dead.

He clutched at a chair, and leant upon it, unable to stand. The power to speak or move went from him, and numb confusion filled his brain. A step sounded near, but he did not hear it. The consciousness of where he was had almost forsaken him.

Chesney came downstairs, and walked to the hall-table. Mr. Rivers saw him faintly. Chesney sighed, and said,

'Poor John!'

Then he looked up, and exclaimed in astonishment,

'Father!'

The aged frame was swaying like a tall elm about to fall. Chesney caught him, and held him up. The aged dim eyes looked at him, seeing nothing. The aged parched lips tried to move. 'John,' was the only word said. Then he sank heavily in his son's supporting arms—helpless and senseless.

God's stroke had fallen upon him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST OF SOMEBODY.

Days passed by, mounting into weeks, and faces about the house had grown brighter, and Rose could smile again, and the children's pitiful looks had vanished.

For John lived still, and the worst was over. Danger might be fairly counted at an end. John had been to death's door—had stood on the brink of the dark river—but he neither entered nor crossed. He was coming back to every-day life.

The coming back was a slow business. Improvement could scarcely be noted from day to day. Muriel sometimes thought that the suffering of this tardy convalescence was almost worse to watch than the actual illness had been. John's own bright thankfulness of spirit was sorely put to the test. His energetic temperament could better have borne any trial than that of such protracted feebleness. Yet he did bear it well.

John knew nothing all this time of his grandfather's presence in the house. Every manner of excitement was forbidden him. Indeed, if he had once heard who was lying in a certain upstairs room, strong indeed must have been the power that could have kept him away. But two or three threatened relapses made his nurses cautious.

Sometimes, though not often, he asked after his grandfather, and wished to know if the old indifference continued. Had he pushed his inquiries farther, evasion would have been difficult; but it was not so. Having been to death's

door, and received no sign, he counted the matter for the present well-nigh hopeless. There was a settled sadness in his manner when he alluded to it.

Chesney had been joined by Sibyl, and they remained at the Rectory. The house would have been over-full, but some of the younger children had been sent to the Manor, under charge of their nurse. Mrs. Bertram made no objection. Her only care was for Lilias. And Lilias faded quietly still. Nothing could be done to check the progress of the disease. Mrs. Bertram never left her—not even to see her father.

For a time it had been thought that the old man could not rally. Yet he too now was showing signs of a more than passing improvement, and fear of immediate death was gone.

One day an unexpected visitor appeared at the Rectory. Muriel was called to the drawing-room, and found Montgomery Maxwell standing dreamily before the window. A wintry view lay outside. There had been a slight fall of snow, and birds were picking up crumbs, carefully strewn over the lawn.

'Ah, those are Connie's pets,' said Muriel, shaking hands with him. 'How dark the evergreens look in comparison with the snow! But, Mr. Maxwell, we all thought you had left England.'

'No—indeed, no—not yet. I am going in two days,' said the tutor nervously. 'I could not venture to see you before I left Claverton—though I knew you were here. But now—knowing how things stand——'

'Why not venture?'

'You were all in such trouble. O yes, and it was forbidden. Perhaps Mr. Rivers might not feel the same now. Besides—I had a longing to say good-bye to John.'

'You would be his first visitor. But I almost think we might take you in.'

'He is better—himself again?'

'Anything but himself. He is better, certainly.'

'Only not up to seeing me. I understand.'

'Yes—if you will be very careful. He does not know about grandpapa's illness, so don't allude to that, or to his being in this house. John will enjoy a sight of you.'

'Thank you—thank you. I am returning by the next train, so I shall not hinder anybody long.'

'It will be no hindrance. Can't you stay all day? Rose will wish it, I know.'

'Thank you, no—better not—better not,' said Mr. Maxwell gently, as if repeating a lesson. 'Far better not. And, indeed, I have an engagement. I made it on purpose,' added the tutor with happy transparency.

Muriel could not help smiling. 'And it can't be unmade, I suppose. Come and see John, Mr. Maxwell. He is in his dressing-room, I believe.'

There he was found, lying on the sofa, ready to welcome anybody. His altered looks greatly shocked the tutor, who for some seconds could not get beyond broken mutters of, 'Dear me !—poor fellow—poor fellow—so ill—quite changed —poor fellow, I couldn't have believed it !'

'Ah ! you should have seen me awhile ago,' said John. 'Positively I made the tour of my bedroom this morning. One learns to plume oneself on small things. That is as great an event now as a twenty miles' walk would have been last year.'

'Mr. Maxwell is going abroad directly,' Muriel observed, for he seemed to have little to say. He sat in a passive attitude, leaning slightly forward, with an abstracted gaze which wandered to and fro between brother and sister. Rose came in for but a small share of his attention.

'These changes have been a trial for you,' said John.

'Yes. It is all for the best.'

'No doubt of that. Some day you will plainly see it so.'

'I see it now—O yes, I see it now.'

'In what way?' Muriel asked impulsively, but she had no answer.

'How do you like your present pupil?' inquired John.

'A gentlemanly young fellow. We shall get on well to-

gether. In fact, I find we possess a curious similarity of tastes,' added Mr. Maxwell, growing suddenly lively. 'He has a love for natural science, greatly discouraged by his family. I hope to make use of it, without hindering more important studies. He is already interested in botany.'

'You will be writing a botanical essay on the Swiss flora, when you come back.'

'Ah—I do look forward with pleasure, I confess, to the mountains. What specimens we may find! I hope to gather a good collection.'

And Montgomery discoursed about families and tribes of the vegetable kingdom with strange forgetfulness of time and circumstance. To check him was not easy. Muriel began to regret her precipitation in bringing him upstairs. Rose tried to lead the talk in another direction, but the tutor heard nothing. John's hand stole furtively to his head.

'Mr. Maxwell, I only gave you leave for a few minutes' call,' Muriel interposed at the first break.

'Yes—I am going. I must catch my train. One instance more, I must mention—John will be so interested——'

'I can't quite follow it all, thank you,' said John. 'When did you see my grandfather last?'

Montgomery paused, and looked back in silence.

'Not since your little affair, I suppose.'

'I—no—I——'

'You have not been to the Manor?'

'Not till to-day. I wished to see Lilias.'

'And my grandfather?'

'I have not supposed it possible. Otherwise I should like—before leaving——'

The cat was as nearly as possible out of the bag. Muriel allowed her little work-box to fall with a crash—opportunely, and certainly not by accident.

'Why, Muriel!' Rose said in surprise, not having read the cause quickly, while Mr. Maxwell stooped to pick up some of the things, and sought a runaway thimble.

'Never mind,' said Muriel, blushing slightly. 'Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Maxwell. I must take you away now, for John can't stand any more.'

John was looking at her curiously, as if perplexed.

'I am wondering if some of you would write to me—some day,' said Mr. Maxwell, standing up. 'I shall want to hear how you are—and poor Lilias, and——'

Muriel felt desperate, and Rose promptly interrupted—'O yes, I will be sure to write. Let me have your address, and you shall hear all about everybody.'

'Thank you. I should be much obliged. I shall be so anxious to hear about Mr. Rivers.'

'Why?' John asked naturally.

'He has not looked well for months past,' said Rose, moving towards the door. 'All accounts agree as to that. Come, Mr. Maxwell, please. I can't allow John another word with you, or we shall have him ill again.'

It was a hurried good-bye, for Rose insisted on no delay. Muriel remained behind, and Montgomery grasped her hand gently, with a wistful look. She was too anxious about John to notice it, and no more passed. He went out of the room and out of the house, having not revealed his secret to Muriel by word or glance. She knew nothing of his victory, or of what she was to him. He left her free and heart-whole for her daily duties.

With her thoughts set upon John, she was only thankful to see the door close behind him. John had a half-hour of faintness more severe than for many days past, but on rallying from it he asked of Muriel—

'What was the matter with you a little while ago?'

'When?'

'When you dropped your box. I fancied the fall not quite natural.'

'I thought it went down very neatly.'

'What was your reason?'

'Must you have a reason?'

'Yes.'

'I had a particular wish to interrupt Mr. Maxwell in his talk. There!' she said, smiling.

'I am afraid my grandfather is looking more ill than any of you will tell me.'

'Suppose he were—what then?'

'I ought to know.'

'What good would that do? Look how fit you are for it, John. You are feeling quite ill now, with only this slight over-fatigue. If we were to discuss every particular of grandpapa's looks for your amusement, you would just stand still altogether.'

'Amusement?'

'Interest then. Your first duty now is to get well.'

'A duty rather hard to perform,' John said wearily.

'Yes—and the more you worry your head with other folks' ailments the harder you make it. Grandpapa was very much tried about you, of course, and—has not been well. But I can tell you one thing to a certainty, and that is that he is better now than a month ago. After that you ought to be satisfied.'

But something else drew near, long-threatened, though little realised. No particular change showed in Lilias from day to day, yet change took place. Muriel was backwards and forwards a good deal between the two houses. It did not seem that she could be spared from the Rectory.

A message came one day, however, through Chesney. 'Could Muriel sleep at home for a day or two?'

'Can you do without me here?' Muriel asked.

'We must. I think you should go.'

'But you don't say Lilias is worse, uncle?'

'No,' Chesney answered slowly. 'Not worse—in any marked way. She seemed brighter than I often find her. But she wishes to see a little more of you. I do not think you could refuse.'

He had an imagination of possible self-reproaches later. So the way was made easy, and Muriel went.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BOND.

MURIEL found the Manor very quiet after the busy Rectory. The children were out of sight in upstairs back-regions. Arthur was silent as usual. Mrs. Bertram rarely opened her lips, save in the presence of Lilias. At all other times she wore a look of gnawing unhappiness. When Lilias could see her, she never failed in cheerfulness.

The 'day or two' lengthened into more. Muriel found that, useful as she might be at the Rectory, there was greater need for her here. Lilias was taken worse that first evening, and the doctor somewhat plainly intimated that the end could be not far distant.

Perhaps Lilias knew this fact as well as he, though it was not repeated to her. She seemed singularly calm, not joyous, but peaceful. Reserve was strong still, and she spoke little. Her clinging to Muriel was, however, unmistakable. To Muriel's surprise, Mrs. Bertram was the first to decide that her duty lay here.

Those closing days of life lasted some two weeks, and passed very quietly. The nursing had little about it of a painful character—there being almost no acute pain, and only occasional difficulty of breathing. The prostration was great, yet Lilias suffered less than John had done in that way.

Muriel had opportunities enough for acting upon her uncle's warning. Now that she was on the alert, she found, by the power of the constant temptation to treat her mother coldly, to show no sympathy, to answer curtly, how strong

the old habits were. Praying and striving she began to show a gentler manner; and whether through this or some other means, Mrs. Bertram likewise seemed different. Of the devoted tenderness showered upon Lilias, Muriel received none, but Mrs. Bertram certainly leant upon her at this time, and seemed to appreciate her help.

Lilias remarked upon the change one day to Muriel. 'I always thought it would be so,' she said.

'It is not much yet, Lily—except that she finds me perhaps a degree less repulsive.'

'You were not that. But your manner to her now is so unlike what it was.'

Then Lilias had also noticed this defect.

'I never intended to be unkind to mamma.'

'No, only chilly. You had reason, of course; but I like things better as they are.'

'I think I had no reason—either for that, or for being cold to you.'

'We didn't understand one another. I used to long for your help, and never expected to have it.'

'Help in what?'

'Why, Muriel—in—don't you understand? I knew I might die young, and I wanted to be ready.'

'And you wanted me to help you?'

'Yes, O for a long while. I never could ask you. It isn't my way. Only I did so wish you would speak to me.'

'I never knew.' But if it had not been for a barrier of, in some measure, Muriel's own raising, she might have known.

'How wrong I was,' she said in a low voice.

'That is nothing now. You have been a dear sister to me lately—since I have been ill. Everything feels different.'

'What things?'

'Everything.'

'You were not ready once,' said Muriel gently. 'Are you now?'

A bright colour rose in Lilias' pale face. 'Yes,' she said.

'Quite ready?'

'Yes. I am not afraid,' said Lilias, with difficulty. 'I can't talk much, you know. But Jesus is my Saviour.'

'O Lily, I am so thankful.'

'Did you not feel sure?'

'Not quite. I had hopes.'

'I think He is mine. I do think I am His,' said Lilias, tears filling her eyes, and Muriel felt satisfied. She had longed for just such an assurance.

A day or two later, when Lilias had been very ill for some hours, and was lying apparently asleep, she suddenly looked up, and said,—

'Mamma dear, Murie must be everything to you now.'

'Lily, Lily—hush!—don't,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'Just this once,' pleaded Lilias. 'I will not say much. But, mamma, you will let Murie be with you, and do things for you. She is so sweet. She has been so good to me. You won't keep her off from you. Yes, I know Murie is here. I like to have you together—and I want you to be very much together—by-and-by.'

Neither of the two could answer her.

'It seems unkind to make you both cry. But I should like you afterwards to remember my wish. Mamma dear, you would do anything for me. And—I know the reason.'

'What reason?' Mrs. Bertram asked in a choked voice.

'About papa—about your not liking Muriel to look quite so Eastern,' said Lilias delicately. 'I asked uncle Chesney, and he told me—and Murie knows too. But she can't help it. God gave her that dear dark face of hers. I love it so,—and you must love it too for my sake. She is handsomer than your white-faced Lily ever was.'

Mrs. Bertram shook her head.

'But that doesn't matter. Nothing of that sort matters. It does not matter, mamma darling. That isn't the great question.'

'No,' said Mrs. Bertram mechanically.

'Things look different when one gets near the end. If I didn't know the love of Jesus, nothing could make me happy. And now I do know it, nothing can make me unhappy. Murie will come after me, and you must too—you must too, mamma. I wanted just to say a few words.'

And Lilias smiled at them, and took a hand of each, and pressed them together with all the little strength she had. Then she dropped asleep, holding still a hand of each.

They stood, one on each side of her bed—united thus, with Lilias for their bond. Was it verily to be so in the future?

A change passed over the frail material bond. The grasp loosened, and the breath faltered. And though they knew not when the moment was, it came to pass that Lilias Bertram in her sleep passed quietly away.

It was fearfully sudden—so everybody said. Only it had not been sudden to Lilias herself. Muriel grieved, but had comfort in her sorrow. Mrs. Bertram's agony was terrible to see. For a week she showed herself inconsolable, would not eat, would not sleep, and wept unceasingly.

But she did not spurn Muriel. Her child's dying wish had taken effect, and Mrs. Bertram in her distress actually turned to her eldest, trusted in her, leant upon her. Heart-love was another matter; kisses were cold still; but Muriel found that she might step into the office of comforter. Any return to the Rectory was out of the question. Mrs. Bertram refused to go there herself, and declared she should die of melancholy if left by Muriel. And Muriel was thankful to be wanted.

The funeral over, Mrs. Bertram returned slowly to her usual state. Long-continued and deep sorrow was not consistent with her somewhat shallow nature. The grief was a tempest while it lasted, but the storm spent itself, the tears wept themselves away, and interest in every-day life crept back into Mrs. Bertram's heart.

No one could again be to her what Lilias had been. There was a grave in the mother's heart, and a wound which

ot quickly heal. She was often very unhappy, very ed, very fractious, but she was not crushed. What she felt showed quickly at the surface, and was not lming.

over, she began to show some interest in the matter el's appearance and dress—nay, even to discuss what were the best for modifying 'that dreadful com-' Muriel was willing to discuss, wear, or do anything winning of a pleased smile from her mother.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOGETHER.

'THIS does look like improvement,' said Chesney, coming back from a walk one cold day, to find John slowly pacing the gravel path in front of the house, with Connie holding his hand.

'I begin to feel I am a man again,' said John.

'You don't look more than the wraith of one yet. How many turns have you taken?'

'Three. I want to have a drive soon.'

'Where?'

'To the Manor.'

'H'm! Well, we shall see.'

'You think my grandfather will refuse to see me?'

Chesney's look might have expressed anything.

'Never mind. I intend to storm the premises.'

'So you shall, some day soon. Get up a little strength first.'

'Connie thinks I am getting up "lots."'

'Very poor amount. Tired out, man? Take my arm. Connie, you can run away.'

'I'll do one more turn,' said John resolutely.

'Is it wise? What a time you have been ill now, to be sure.'

'Yes. Strange *his* sending no message,' muttered John. 'I used to think my illness might be the means of bringing him round. Well—what of Muriel to-day?'

'Good girl—behaving admirably. I didn't know there

was such self-devotedness in her before. She lives for Mary, —consults every fancy, attends to every wish.'

'And aunt Mary understands?'

'She values the attentions fairly well. Things are on a happier footing than before. Muriel is different too. Of course Mary did not treat her rightly, but that was no excuse. Hers was not the manner for a girl to put on, under any circumstances, towards a mother. I am glad poor Maxwell is off the scene. We don't want any messes in that direction.'

'Muriel is quite unconscious.'

'Quite. He has acted nobly, I must say. But Mary could never consent—least of all now. Her hopes and the ambitions will gradually centre themselves in Muriel. Women must have a centre, round which to draw their circle.'

'Did you see my grandfather to-day?'

'At the Manor? No. John, this is enough for you.'

'I'll go in.'

Rose was coming out, and met them at the door. She saw John on the sofa, and beckoned Chesney out of the room. But an incautious whisper reached John's ears; 'better wait! Overdone just now.' He was up and beside them in a moment.

'What is the matter?' he demanded.

'Go and lie down, John, like a sensible man. Your olden appearance has made Rose nervous.'

Highly nervous!' said John, leaning against a cabinet of bills. 'What are you talking about?'

Come in here, if you are determined to have it out,' said Chesney, marching back into the drawing-room, and John was fain to follow. 'Sit down and take it quietly. Rose, don't fluster yourself.'

Then something is the matter?' said John.

Something generally is. The long and short of this particular matter is that my father nearly broke his heart about you when you were at your worst, and has been ill in consequence.'

'Ill! Not seriously?'

'Dangerously, but better now. You are getting on, both of you.'

John was very much overcome. He sat looking on the ground, not trusting himself to speak.

'He held out to a point, you see, and then broke down. But don't be anxious. He is pulling through, all right.'

'Has he spoken of me?'

'He has said your name. That is about all he can accomplish.'

'So bad?' said John, distressed.

'The paralysis has affected his speech. Only temporarily, we hope.'

'But he is conscious. He would know me. I must drive to the Manor this afternoon.'

'No need,' said Chesney quietly. 'He is in this house.'

'He! My grandfather! Rose, why have you never told me?'

John was on the borders of downright anger for a moment.

'Rose has no responsibility. The doctors forbade it. See how fit you are now, John,' said Chesney gravely. 'Don't make yourself ill again.'

'No.'

John put back the hair from his forehead with trembling fingers, and then rested his head against the sofa-arm, looking spent. Rose glanced at Chesney.

'Not quite "up to anything" yet,' said Chesney. 'You must lie still for an hour, John.'

But that suggestion brought John to his feet. 'No—on no account. It is nothing—only a feeling of weakness. I am all right now. He shall not want me for another ten minutes. He does want me, you think, Rose?'

'I don't believe you are ever out of his thoughts.'

'Will he need preparing?'

'I think not,' said Rose. 'We were talking about it this morning, and Dr. Peters advised your being taken in with-

warning. But, John dear, you will not stay long. I
't have you ill again even for grandpapa's sake.'
No fear. This is as good as a tonic.'
Fatigue seemed for the moment to be forgotten. John
od and moved with his usual vigour. 'Can't be helped
w. The quicker the better,' Chesney muttered, and they
nt upstairs.
It was an out-of-the-way room, but withal a very cosy one.
curtained bedside stood opposite the door, and a withered
e lay there on the white pillow, with hair as white falling
nd it. Sad hollow eyes were those, looking out with a
sty expression, as if seeking something which they never
nd. He had looked thus ever since consciousness re-
ned. Once he had asked for John, and they told him
hn should come soon—when well enough. He did not
k a second time, only the longing eyes seldom ceased in
eir anxious quest.
Suddenly a change came into them. For steps sounded
tside the door, and without warning John entered.
He came in quietly, making no stir. On the way upstairs
had schooled himself into composure. He stood beside
e bed, and only said:
'Grandfather!'
The hungry eyes were fixed on him, and the bony hands
asped at him feebly. A strong emotion shook the old man
m head to foot, till the bed swayed beneath him. John
t down, holding the aged hands between his own thin ones,
derly as a woman could have done.
'Dear grandfather, here I am at last,' he said. 'You
ow your John, don't you?'
Mr. Rivers struggled in a painful way for speech. It was
tressing to see his utter inability. He strove in vain, and
avy tears fell from his eyes.
'Never mind. I quite understand. Some day you will
l me,' said John. 'All is forgiven and forgotten now,
't it?'

The old man shook his head despairingly. Rose brought a small slate to the bed.

'Sometimes he can write a few words,' she said, and John held it in the right position.

Mr. Rivers clutched at the pencil, but his shaking hand was almost powerless. Twice he tried and failed. A third time the semblance of letters appeared. John, following his uncertain movements, read:

'My—dear—John——'

There he paused, strength coming to an end.

'Always your John, grandfather,' said John huskily.

Again the old man mournfully moved his head from one side to the other, and again took the pencil.

'Forgive——'

There he broke down. The pencil dropped, and his long heart-broken sob was like a child's pitiful wail. It came again and again. John was almost unnerved. He could only say, 'Don't!'

Mr. Rivers pointed to the word earnestly.

'We won't speak of that any more. All is forgiven. We are going to be happy now, all together,—please God.'

The old man's look grew more restful. He lay gazing at John for awhile, as if dreading to lose him. But presently the eyelids dropped, the feeble grasp loosened, and sleep gained the mastery.

'Come,' said Chesney gently, touching John.

And John went out of the room, and wept like a child. No offence to his manliness that he did so.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AS OF OLD.

ny dear boy, yes—but it is only fit that I should go
ng all my days.'
nonths had passed, and a pleasant little trio sat in the
study. John had come in for a cup of tea, accord-
ıis wont of late. He looked fairly strong again after
:ss, while Mr. Rivers, in his easy-chair, was a broken-
)ld man. Muriel, with a bright face, made the tea.
ertram and Arthur were engaged elsewhere. Every
our in John's busy life was given to his grandfather.
hought it might not be for long.
ıt sounds like the little widow of Tea-caddy Cottage,'
hn cheerfully.
en I look back—when I think of all my past life—it
upon me like lead,' said Mr. Rivers. He spoke
and with a slightly thickened intonation. 'Nearly
ɣears of sin—sin—sin, John.'
:, but "where sin abounded grace did much more
," my dear grandfather.'
ing grace, yes. Nothing but grace can do for me.
do trust—I do hope. But I am hard and cold, John.
l tree can't be bent like the young one. After dis-
ing my God for nearly eighty years, He will let me
aps—just creep into heaven.'
)n't exactly understand that "perhaps,"' said John
'Christ never said, "Come unto Me, and perhaps
ive you rest."'

'I do hope—a little,' faltered Mr. Rivers.

'Hope that God may keep His word?' John asked in his gentlest manner.

'My dear John, He will. I am sure He will.'

'Then you are sure you are safe.'

'So unworthy. If you did but know! Some can give service. I cannot. Those wasted years!' and Mr. Rivers sighed heavily. 'Temper has been my bane. "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools"—of fools—fools. How true!'

'That was the old past mastery, grandfather. The Evil One reigned then. A stronger than he has come in now.'

'Yes, yes, John. I do believe it, and do hope,' repeated the old man. 'But as for being glad, it would not be right. It would not be seemly, my dear boy.'

'That sounds rather like Muriel's old tune,' said John, smiling. 'I don't hear it now, Murie. Somehow the joy-note seems taking its right place in the melody.'

'I think I learnt to sing while my cage was darkened,' said Muriel.

'And grandfather thinks he is never to learn,' said John.

'No, no, John—I'll go all my days in bitterness, like King Hezekiah.'

'I hope King Hezekiah was too wise to keep his resolution. I see no distinctions in the Bible, for my part, between those who may and those who may not rejoice—of the Lord's own children. "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous." It does not say, "some of ye righteous."'

'But, my dear boy——'

'I quoted that verse to Mrs. Rokeby,' observed Muriel, 'and she said, "Who can count himself righteous? Not I."'

'And quoted at you in return, no doubt, "There is none righteous, no, not one," with a reference to the "chief of sinners." I thought so. A good many people profess to come under that description, who would be very much annoyed if so classified by their friends. There is the true test of humility. Besides, the question is not, Who can

count himself righteous?—but, Whom does God count righteous?'

'So I told her.'

'Not mine own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. "I will rejoice in the Lord . . . for He hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness." We stand all three side by side here. Nothing in ourselves. Everything in Jesus our Lord.'

Mr. Rivers bent his head, but gave no direct answer.

These little chats were of common occurrence. There had been a Divine work going on silently and mightily in the soul of the old man. He was greatly changed in many respects. Self-distrust was gaining ground, where pride had reigned; gentleness, where temper had been rampant. At times flashes of the old nature broke forth. Hardly surprising, this. The shackles of eighty years' growth were hard to shake off; and the old nature, though crucified and dying, was not yet dead.

Muriel's manner of life for the present seemed to be marked out for her. She did not drop visiting certain Claverton invalids, but out-of-door calls had taken a secondary position. She lived for her mother and grandfather.

It was by no means a life without trial. Mrs. Bertram was kinder than of old, and had grown to value her daughter's companionship, nay, even to be exacting of her leisure. Still, Muriel's warm love met with a poor response. Muriel had by this time ceased to look for more. She bore cheerily the pain of knowing that her intense affection was alike unreturned and unappreciated. The more she had been thrown with her mother, the more that mother's want of depth and narrowness of intellect had become manifest to Muriel's vigorous mind. But of this she spoke to no living soul. A life of habitual self-denial was beautifying Muriel's character in a marked manner. No other means could have had precisely the same effect.

'Muriel, you are running very far ahead of me,' Sophy Rokeby said to her one day.

'How, Sophy?'

'Holding the things of this world more loosely. I do so cling to everything that I love.'

'I am stronger than you.'

'Bodily? Some would say that must make you cling the more. No—I think it is just a question of "the affections" being "set on things above."'

'It seems sometimes as if the last two or three years had been with me a systematic shaking loose from earthly affections,' said Muriel. 'I feel a difference—looking back.'

'And I—see it.'

'Don't lift me up on a pedestal, Sophy. That is no friendly office, for in falling off one generally comes down hard.'

'Perhaps I have had some shakings loose too,' said Sophy. 'Only I find I am so apt to tie the strings again on the first opportunity.'

'Sophy, I do think that so long as one is truly rejoicing in the Lord, there is no fear that the rejoicing in earthly things will take a wrong place.'

Sophy pondered.

'Yes,' she said. 'It may be just that. For we are commanded to rejoice in everything—only "before the Lord" all the time. Then now help me with a thought. I am often troubled on one head. Think of me lying here, day after day, with the same old weary round of life—and I may have to lie here fifty years and more. How could I ever "rejoice always" through fifty years? The very idea is like a great weight upon me.'

'I don't wonder,' Muriel answered. 'God never gave you the fifty years to bear at once, Sophy.'

'But they must come—if I live long enough.'

'Yes—if. There is no "must" in your case or mine. Besides, you never yet had two days in one, and you never will have.'

Sophy looked comforted.

'Then I am always to take each day by itself, and leave the rest alone.'

'Yes—till each one comes in turn. Do you know that though I am up and about and busy, I was troubled last summer with that very same thought. It seemed impossible, looking ahead, that I could always keep up a spirit of gladness, year after year.

'Well—and one evening about then, I went to walk on the path outside the avenue. I don't know why I chose it. All at once there came a bright gleam of light through the first tree, straight upon me. It was just autumn, and the leaves were turning, and the light had a golden sparkle about it—rather uncommon. I stood still to look, and I thought how lovely it was, and what a pity it seemed that I must leave that spot—for the trees ahead looked quite dull and green, with no sparkle or light about them.

'It was so strange! When I went on, and reached the next tree, just such another gleam flashed through it upon me, and so it was at the third and fourth, and all along the whole avenue. Every tree in turn, however dull it looked beforehand, the moment I came up turned into a green veil, with a glory shining through. The light came from the sun, which was near its setting, and it came at just such a slant that I could not catch each gleam, till the tree lay between the sun and me.

'It seemed to strike me all in a moment, how life is just like that to God's children. We look on, and life seems dull, with nothing to enliven it—and yet, as each day comes, there is always the gleam, if only we will look up for it. I thought the one gleam was all—but the brightness lasted right on to the end of the avenue.'

'And right on to the end of life,' said Sophy, smiling, as if her face had caught the reflection.

'Yes, indeed. I have sometimes thought of telling you my little fancy. We have our Sun of Righteousness, have

we not? I do believe half the clouds that come betw
Him and us are of our own making. But if we only k
our eyes fixed on Him, the gladness never need stop.'

'No. And with joy comes victory,' said Sophy. '
"the joy of the Lord is our strength."'

SECOND PART.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LITTLE HOUSE AT BUSHBY.

five minutes' walk distant from Bushby church and
ɜ, stood a rather romantic little house, swathed in
l embowered among elms, possessing pointed gables,
ving an irregularity of outline which caused it to
a good deal larger than it really was. The last-
consideration weighed not a little with its present
, Mrs. Bertram.

ivy might be productive of spiders, the trees of
ss, the pointed gables of inconvenience. What
d all such minor considerations, compared with the
dly aristocratic' result of the whole?

or some eight months past—in fact, ever since the
of her aged father, Mr. Rivers—Mrs. Bertram, with
ghter Muriel, had lived here.

mn was creeping slowly with gold-edged slippers
e land, when the two ladies sat together one day, in
r window of their drawing-room. The tall elms
thickly in about the house showed many a yellow
d prevailing green.

Bertram counted it one of the deprivations of her
life to have only two sitting rooms, and was wont to
herself over her hard fate. 'It was not befitting,'
mplained often, to her long-enduring daughter.
: trial was the name of her new abode. After
ton Manor,' it was melancholy to descend to 'Elm
-'so fearfully Cockney in sound,' she said. And

having vainly endeavoured to transform the objectionable title into 'Claverton House,' she was at pains to induce all her friends to address their letters to 'Mrs. Bertram, Bushby, ——shire.' The sight of an envelope bearing the inscription, 'Mrs Bertram, Elm Villa, Bushby,' threw her into nervous irritation for hours, by which it will be seen that Mrs. Bertram was scarcely a woman of profound intellect or lofty aims.

Such a letter having arrived by this particular morning's post, the dent on Mrs. Bertram's white brow, as she sat with folded hands, gazing out upon the lawn, might perhaps have been the more easily explained.

Though well on in middle life, Mrs. Bertram was still a fair woman to look upon. She had a carefully-kept aspect. There were not more than eighteen years between Muriel and her mother, and, judging from appearances, the eighteen might have been reduced by half. Mrs. Bertram at fifty often passed for forty.

Muriel, though hardly one to age quickly, yet showed to the full her three-and-thirty years. Though past her first bloom, she could hardly fail to win admiration, but a slightly worn look, as of approaching middle life, was already visible in cheek and temple. It was a face capable of brilliant animation, but the ordinary smile was sweet rather than bright, and the lips in repose fell into a set of half-sorrowful patience. The deep mourning in which both ladies were dressed, unrelieved by a tinge of colour, made Muriel seem older than her wont, while it only caused Mrs. Bertram to look by contrast the more delicately fair.

'I met Mr. Wentworth to-day,' said Mrs. Bertram, playing with her jet bracelet. She rarely occupied herself with books or work, but lived what she counted a life of ladylike ease, and what other folks of more vigorous character would count an inane existence of objectless idleness. Muriel was expected to be in a state of perpetual readiness for conversation. She had lately taken up the pursuit of flower-

ing, as compatible with this state of things. A half-blown upon a spray of maiden-hair lay beside her, and the vere being transferred to paper with a free yet accurate ı. Intent as she was on her work, she immediately ed up to say,—

suppose you exchanged bows.'

stopped and spoke to him. He is a most agreeable uperior young man.'

[e is a gentleman,' admitted Muriel, studying the fern. ne would hardly expect to find the grandson of an earl ing else. That is my comfort. I could not endure to parvenu in possession of the Manor. It would simply me. I could not bear it. Imagine if that old Mr. had been the purchaser. A man that made his y entirely through the sale of whisky. I think I l have died of shame.'

riel's eyes were full, but she only remarked—'Blankets, hisky.'

rs. Fordyce told me whisky. But it does not matter . Either would be unendurable.'

like Miss Wentworth better of the two,' remarked l, after a slight pause.

iss Wentworth!—better than her brother! Your taste uliar. She is a good woman no doubt, but when you said that you have said all.'

ım afraid the aristocratic element doesn't show in her inly as in her brother,' said Muriel, with a gleam of ur. 'But really they have behaved very pleasantly—if hey will go on keeping aloof.'

ıat is unnecessary,—when once they have proved their not to be intrusive. We are likely to see more of as time goes on.'

hope not,' was the involuntary answer.

ou seem extremely anxious to tie me down to a tage-life—I who have been all my life accustomed to ery best of society,' said Mrs. Bertram, putting her

handkerchief to her eyes. 'This dull existence may be very well suited to you, and of course for a time it was necessary and proper, but I do believe that if it were to go on much longer I should die of ennui. It is insupportable. I am growing so nervous that the slightest sound startles me. I think you ought to have *some* consideration for my feelings.'

'I am very glad you should know the Wentworths better, if it really gives you pleasure,' said Muriel, after a pause.

'They are in the county set,' said Mrs. Bertram, as if that settled the question. 'It certainly does give me pleasure. Mr. Wentworth asked me leave to-day to send me a brace of partridges, to tempt my appetite, as he did not think me looking well. It was done in a most gentlemanly manner. I could not refuse, so there is no need for you to frown. I thought it extremely considerate of him,—so early in the season too. I should like you to encourage the Wentworths more than you have done, Muriel. I have no objection to a stately manner, for it becomes you, but you are certainly disposed to treat Mr. Wentworth too much *de haut en bas*. Be as stately as you will, but be gracious at the same time. You know how. As it is, you make him uncomfortable.'

'Poor man! He must learn to keep his distance,' said Muriel, half-smiling. 'As for stateliness or non-stateliness, my only wish is to be natural.'

'That with you means bluntness, and bluntness is in the highest degree objectionable. You should make suavity your aim. And as for the Wentworths, there is not the slightest reason why we should not be intimate with them. You have confessed before now that you like Mr. Wentworth.'

'O yes, I like him,' said Muriel in a moderate voice. 'I esteem him and respect him. Mamma, I saw Rose this afternoon, and even she is beginning at last to feel nervous about John.'

'John has himself to thank. He ought to have taken warning a year ago.'

'No, it is ever since *that day*,' said Muriel in a low voice. 'He has never lost the cough since. He said to me at the time that it was no common chill.'

'Then he ought to have given up work at once. Every one knows him to be consumptive. He has no right to throw away his life. He will just be laid by again the moment the weather turns cold.'

'Rose says he talks of having a second curate this winter. The cough has been so bad at night the last two weeks, and preaching tries him terribly.'

'John is simply insane about the parish,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'I think his wife and children ought to be considered. But he is past reason. People of that kind always are. However, I was speaking about Mr. Wentworth, not about John. I cannot imagine what you mean by your wishes to keep him at a distance.' This was not strictly true, for in her heart Mrs. Bertram knew the reason perfectly well. 'You acknowledge that you like him. He is wealthy, well-connected, well-informed——'

'Not intellectual,' said Muriel.

'That is a matter of comparison. He is quite sufficiently well-informed, and has ease in conversation, which is all one requires. He may be a little peculiar sometimes, but a man in his position may do things which a man in another position may not do. Besides, he is religious. He is as religious as you are yourself, Muriel.' This came triumphantly, for Mrs. Bertram could put up with religion in an earl's grandson to almost any amount, and she felt it to be a powerful weapon with Muriel. 'You told me you had seen him at one of Mr. Fielding's prayer-meetings, and I hear that he positively gave a cottage-lecture to the working-men in Claverton last week. What more can you want?'

'Nothing, except to be left alone,' said Muriel, her brows drawing together again.

'You are perverse. I shall certainly expect you to show more warmth of manner to Mr. and Miss Wentworth from

to-day, and not to deprive me of a pleasant friendship by your whims.'

Mrs. Bertram was annoyed; no unusual event. She rose slowly, gathering her handkerchief, scent-bottle and fan, from either side. Muriel said nothing. Offers of help at that moment would have been spurned. She watched her mother sweep from the room, and then went to the window. A troubled restless look came into her face, as she stood gazing up into the shading elms. In certain moods they oppressed her by their height and nearness. She had a sense of being shut up, hemmed in, cut off from the outer world. Physically and mentally her field of view was circumscribed.

'O God, my will is *not* subdued,' she murmured passionately half-aloud, not with any distinct thought of prayer, but from a habit of turning at all times to Him from whom alone she could always look for sympathy. The perpetual presence of her God was a real and realised matter with Muriel Bertram.

'My will is *not* subdued,' she repeated. 'Years ago I thought the victory was won, and now I find myself weak as ever. Shall I ever lose this craving—for something—something earthly which I have not? What matter? I have the heavenly joy. And yet I suppose it does matter, must matter in this life. I am no stoic. John would tell me I need not wish to be. And I do not. It is not stoicism that I mean. But if my hold upon heavenly things were more intense, would not the earthly grow pale? Outward calm,—that is not so hard to keep up. Maybe I could feel calmer within, if I gave way more outwardly. People call me 'placid,'—little knowing! "O for the wings of a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest!" Would I? No, not unless it were God's will. Not if my God would have me stay here. Why, the very coils and toils and the poor puny littleness of this life are of His appointing. Can there be littleness in doing His will, for love of Him? I don't believe

t. Perhaps I need just this discipline. Perhaps? Why, f I did not, it would not be given me. Father, Thy will be lone.'

The opening door behind made Muriel turn suddenly, vith her usual composure, expecting to see her mother. nstead of Mrs. Bertram a gentleman entered—a man hardly orty years of age, thin to attenuation, hollow-cheeked, flushed nd frail. His brown eyes gave Muriel one hasty smile, nd then he sat down on the sofa, leaning forward with his orehead against the back of a chair, coughing and gasping ainfully. Muriel moved to his side, and waited with a face f no small concern.

'John, what makes you like this?'

The new-comer had difficulty in speaking. 'The hill,' e said with an effort.

'Not this bit of slope from the vicarage?'

'It always tries me.'

'I have seen you out of breath with it, but not so. I ave not seen you like this before.'

'I came too fast,' he said, resting his head on his hands vith evident suffering. 'I can't expect it to lessen. Besides, have been a good deal tried to-day.'

'How? But don't talk yet. Rest first,' she said, putting e sofa-cushion behind him, and he submitted with closed es. Muriel had rarely seen her cousin so spent. Some u-de-Cologne on his forehead seemed to revive him, and : said, 'Thank you; I shall be better directly.'

'What has worried you to-day?'

'It is not precisely a case of worry. I don't see my way ear.'

'As to what?'

'Plans for the future.'

'Have there not been plans and changes enough this st year? O John! let them alone.'

'How if they will not let me alone?' asked John, breath- g quickly. 'I thought I had feathered my nest for life,

and now— Well, perhaps it was growing too dear to me. After all, we are birds of passage.'

'What?' said Muriel, with an alarmed look.

'Plans and changes still,' said John, with rather a sad smile. 'It must be so, Murie. This is a life of change. It is not for you or me to cry "Hold, enough!" The ebb and flow will never cease till "the former things have passed away." No more sea, then; but now we are leaflets tossed upon the ocean. The ebb and flow must bear us to and fro. Leaflets—yet subject to a Father's care.'

Muriel sat looking at him, one question after another quivering unspoken on her lips.

'Which way don't you see clear?' she asked at length.

'My own. Don't tell Mr. Bryce! I have been to Dr. Peters.'

'To Claverton. Too far for you, John. No wonder you are overdone. But Mr. Bryce could say nothing. Dr. Peters has attended our family for thirty years. What made you go?'

'I met Dr. Peters yesterday. He was on his way to the vicarage, to tell me of a certain Dr. Stephens, great in the London world, just come to Claverton to see Miss Grant. He has stayed two nights, and goes back this evening. The visit must have cost Mrs. Grant a serious amount.'

'She can afford it. But go on.'

'Mrs. Grant kindly proposed, and Dr. Peters seconded the motion, that Dr. Stephens and I should have an interview.'

'A consultation.'

'If you like to call it so. I saw Dr. Peters ten days ago, and told him I had very little strength left. He has been feeling rather anxious since.'

'Rose did not tell me this afternoon what you had gone to Claverton for.'

'She did not know. I saw no need to give her a troubled afternoon.'

d she did not ask your reason?'

. Rose is a model wife,' said John, smiling. 'Don't nt to ask a question just now, Murie? The long ıort of the matter is that I am forbidden another in England.'

el looked stunned.

: south of France, I suppose,' she said dreamily.

Peters would like the Nile for me. Then I could t in the summer. But the expense would be great, ın't do it in rough style. And one winter would not ıgh, if I live.'

el pressed her lips together. They were trembling past control.

dear Murie, we may all say that,' remarked John. ve—if you live! The weak folks often live on, where ng ones are cut off. They do not look upon my hopeless, but neither believes I should see the end ıer English winter. The other proposal is Australia or three years.'

ohn!'

el started up and went to the window. She did not ow to face the thought; yet presently she came ying: 'Anything for the sake of your health.'

on't know, after all, whether I might not stay and out.'

ıt what out?'

ughed.

: is a practical question. But they may be mistaken. struggle through.'

ll events the right to run the risk is not yours, if it voided. Stay at home, and deliberately throw your ! It would be positively wicked.'

ı you and Rose are agreed.'

you too! Confess,' she said with would-be cheer-

: would pack up and be off to the Nile next week.

But it isn't so easy to manage. The question of the wherewithal looks serious, though she will see no difficulties. I am not a rich man. Nile boats are expensive,—so are boys' schools, travelling outfits, *locum tenens*.'

'But if it must be done——'

'"Must" never outruns "can."'

'You have money lying by.'

'Rose's——'

'As if Rose would think that made any difference.'

'Aye, and how then if I am taken? How about Rose and the children?' John spoke huskily.

'But if it would save your life—this change——'

'*If*. We do not know that it would.'

Muriel could stand no more at the moment. 'I must see where mamma is,' she said, and she quietly left the room. Coming back a little later she found John standing at the window.

'Where is aunt Mary?' he asked.

'I—forgot to ask, John.'

'What were you looking at so earnestly when I was passing along the path?'

Muriel hesitated. 'At my cage-bars,' she said in a low voice.

'You don't get quite reconciled yet to your new home?'

'Reconciled, yes. I do not love it, John. But I would not leave it unless God wills.'

'Come, that is right so far,' said John, laying his hand on her shoulder. 'And if I must leave my nest, I *would* leave it, since God so wills.'

'And the wherewithal?'

'Jehovah-jireh,' he said reverently.

'Then why look anxious?'

'I am anxious to keep Rose from making a false step. She would sacrifice everything to me. It is not right. I must consider her and the children.'

'Yes, and there is no difficulty,' said Muriel suddenly,

er face lighting up. 'There is no difficulty, John. You nd Rose must save of course. But I have no such claims n me. There are those few hundreds of mine at the bank; did not think of them at the first moment. They will put ll straight.'

John did not find it easy to smile. 'Never speak of uch a thing again, if you don't want to grieve me more an I can tell you,' he said unsteadily. 'Nothing of that ind, Muriel. Don't destroy the freedom I have now in lling you our little troubles.'

'Sisters may help brothers without any risk of giving pain. Vhat do you suppose I shall ever want to get for myself, in omparison with seeing you well again?'

'Not that way,' said John.

'I shall settle it all with Rose. You know what I am hen my mind is set upon a thing. It would be the greatest appiness that I could have. Honestly, John, you need ot feel any scruples. If I don't spend the money on you, shall spend it on this house. Mamma will always find esh needs, as long as I have a single loose hundred lying t the bankers'. Half has gone already.'

'It is not right. You ought to make a stand there.'

'I hate making a stand on my own account. But it is ear enough now what I ought to do. Never mind, don't orry yourself. I will talk to Rose.'

'Rose will feel as I do,' said John, turning from the win- ow. 'The thing is so impossible that it is not worth dis- ussion. You will vex me seriously if you say any more.'

'As if you ever were vexed with me. That would be the op too much in my cup, John. But I am not afraid. oing? O, not yet. Here comes mamma.'

Mrs. Bertram swept in, with her head thrown back. She ad not yet forgotten her displeasure, as Muriel knew in a oment.

'John here? You will stay for a cup of tea, of course,' he said, without noticing Muriel.

'I think not, thank you. I am forbidden to be out late.'

'Late! this brilliant evening. Nonsense,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'Ring the bell and sit down, John. We will have tea before I take off my bonnet. I have just seen Rose, and she tells me you are not so well. What is this about your leaving England?'

The ground had all to be gone over again. John was obliged to give his own explanations, Muriel's presence being ignored. High-bred woman of the world that Mrs. Bertram was, she could in an ill-humour so far forget her unexceptionable manners as to be guilty of turning a cold shoulder and a deaf ear. Muriel was used to this. There had been a time in her life when uniform coldness had been the order of the day, as regarded her mother's manner towards herself. She had not that now to endure. But with increase of warmth there seemed to have grown up an increase of variability, and with more of affection had developed more of caprice. Also the last year's reverses had somewhat shaken Mrs. Bertram's nerves, and rendered her temper more irritable.

'Why not try Bournemouth? That would be less expense,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'I suggested that, or Torquay, but the doctors were very determined.'

'Absurd!' was Mrs. Bertram's comment. 'They did not recommend anything of the kind for Lilias.' It was her way to speak with unfaltering composure of her youngest and favourite daughter.

'Hers may have been a more hopeless case from the first. They do not count mine hopeless,' John said. But Mrs. Bertram's manner of meeting the question was depressing. Muriel saw a tired shadow creeping over his face, and his next remark was a low—'If Bournemouth would do, it might be best. I must not run into needless extravagance.'

'What did Dr. Stephens say about your health?'

: I could get through another English

ıred. She had a horror of any words
ect of death. 'Very wrong of him,'
had no business to say any such thing
f frightening a patient with such an
ıss doctor would do so. Who is this

lisgrace, and broke in impulsively with
ve been reserved for another time:
ır and easy enough. I have told John,
tell Rose, how it is to be managed.
ıundreds of mine lying at the bank—
much. John will take them for the
l not be put to a better use.'
e stiffly after a pause.
to have no voice in the matter. I
:—my comfort and convenience—but
quence to you.'
ıence to both of us,' said John, rising.
is running insanely after impossibilities.
such a thing for a moment.'
mollified. 'You are not going yet?'
ry tired.'
morrow, then, and tell us what is

him to the front door. It faced the
e veil of green trees there came variable
ł from the setting sun. Muriel looked
ohn's face, where she caught a look so
he said involuntarily, 'Mamma is right.
ıot to have told you so much.'
frighten" me?' he asked, half smiling.

ak the truth.'
ıobbed. 'John, don't let their words

make you nervous. That would do you harm. I think you feel so now.'

'Not for myself. I can leave all that—and welcome the call when it comes. But—Rose, and Connie, and the boys——'

'"Jehovah-jireh" for them also,' she said softly. 'Cannot you leave them as well as yourself in His hands?'

John's face relaxed. 'Aye. Well, it will all come right. "A father of the fatherless." Thank you, Murie; you have strengthened me. I was feeling very downhearted for my poor Rosie when I came in.'

'O John, how easy it is to preach, and how hard to practise! And now you will go home, and take an evening's rest.'

She watched him through the trees to the garden gate. If she had strengthened John she did not feel strong in herself; and while wisely recommending John to trust his children in a Father's hands, she found it not easy to trust John in those same loving hands. She took refuge in her own room for a while, before venturing to return to the drawing-room. Mrs. Bertram's comments would have broken down her composure altogether.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LOST WORD.

It was not the season, and London was empty. But 'empty' in London does not signify what 'empty' anywhere else would mean. Whether London itself could the more correctly be said to be 'in' or 'out of' town, there were folks enough on the pathway and vehicles enough in the roadway of Regent Street to impress the senses of any country-bred individual.

Such seemed to be a rather tall and slight-made man, standing in the middle of the pavement near the lower end of Regent Street, hat in hand. His shoulders had the genuine student's stoop, and a breeze lifting his silky brown hair, wavy and grey-streaked, showed more fully the intellectual development of brow and temples. His lips moved nervously, as if he were conning something over in his mind, while the gaze of his mild grey eyes into vacancy had the pain which bespeaks a struggle to remember some forgotten data.

Country-bred enough to be amazed at London streets, he plainly was not, but no true Londoner would have stood in that particular spot, thus lost to the outer world. Cabs, hansoms, omnibuses, dashing past, were unnoticed. Passers-by jostled him in vain. He meekly yielded to the pressure, and stepped aside, only to be jostled back to his first position. Pickpockets might have found him a tempting object, only it happened that a vigilant policeman had an eye upon him.

'Mrs.—Mrs.—Mrs.—— I have not the faintest recollection of her name. Why did I not bring the letter?'

Hoping against hope that he might after all have done so, the thoughtful gentleman retired a few paces to the partial shelter of a corner between shop-window and door, there to turn out his pockets. It was rather a lengthy operation. He had a voluminous and well-stuffed pocket-book. Though oblivious to the stir around, his attention was easily drawn from one matter to another by the said papers. Now and then he forgot altogether the object of his search, and had to consider a while before it came again to mind.

'Arthur's last—ah, I must answer that soon. The dear lad seems doing well in his curacy. I wish he were not so far north.' The letter was glanced through vaguely. 'Three months since he wrote. How time slips away. I wish he would give me more particulars of his family. He always fancies I shall have heard everything from other quarters, but I do not now—not now. Once it was different. However, the details of his parish work are very interesting. He is quite right to think he cannot tell me too much about it.'

A gust of wind sent two or three loose sheets flying, and the gentleman had difficulty in capturing his runaways. Flushed and panting he came back, as by instinct, to his former retreat, though the chase had taken him some little distance.

'I must take care. All safe, I see; yes, all safe. I would not have lost this letter of little Connie's for a good deal. She must be quite a young lady now, and we should be almost strangers if we met . . . . Drummond—ah, yes, Drummond. I must not forget that I am to see him. He has something to say—"important communications" to make—some little legal paper to sign, no doubt. Everything of that kind is important in poor Drummond's eyes. I suppose I shall meet him at Mrs.—Mrs.—what *is* her name? No doubt that is what he means. But I ought to have brought the letter with me. I read it in too much haste. Now, if I could find his former note to me,—I know he mentions her name in that.'

The note was sought in vain. He gave it up, and looked around.

'A hansom would save time; more expensive than an omnibus, I must not forget that. But I think for once I may venture. It cannot be more than—two miles distant, or three?' This was an extremely loose conjecture, for though a man of highly cultivated intellect, he had not the dimmest practical knowledge as to London distances.

'Two miles, I imagine. I must not let the man overcharge me. And the rate of payment is—sixpence a mile, I think. Or a shilling a mile. Not more than that, I am quite sure.'

Having reached this satisfactory conclusion, and received another severe jostle from an impatient gentleman in whose path he happened to stand, he went to the edge of the pavement and hailed a hansom. Once in he felt safe. No need to take any more trouble till landed at the right door. Happily he did not forget the address of the house where he was due, though the owner's name had slipped through a hole in his memory. With a feeling of repose he leaned back, folded his arms, gazed at his horse's back, and sank into reverie.

The drive might have been in length equally an hour and a half or half an hour for aught he knew. Sudden cessation of movement woke him up. The driver bent forward.

'Here we are, sir. Number sixty-two.'

'Thank you—yes—all right.'

The 'fare' alighted in rather hurried and confused style, and asked 'How much?' The amount promptly named sounded a good deal, but it was paid without a murmur, and the hansom vanished. The gentleman went slowly up the broad steps of a handsome West-end mansion.

'Mrs.—Mrs.—Mrs.——'

He pressed his hand to his head—in vain. He gazed at the trees in the middle of the square—in vain. He looked

at the flower-wreathed balcony over him—in vain. In despair he rang and knocked. A smart young man-servant appeared.

'Is Mrs.—Mrs.——' and a pause. 'Is your mistress at home?'

The servant looked suspicious, being a Londoner. He made no answer.

'Your mistress at home?' repeated the new-comer rather faintly.

'Mrs.—who did you say?' asked the footman superciliously.

A slight blush rose to the other's cheeks. 'I am very sorry—but the name has entirely escaped my memory. It is very strange—but——'

'Very strange,' said the man-servant with a scarcely-veiled sneer. 'Some mistake, sir, I should think.'

And the door began to close.

'I beg your pardon, but you must let me explain,' said the gentleman mildly. 'My memory is bad, but I am acquainted with your mistress. That is to say I know some members of her family well, and I met her once—I think—yes, I am almost sure I did.'

The speaker was growing rather perplexed, while the footman looked as if he had stumbled upon an oddity for once in his life.

'You will kindly take her my card. She will see me, I know.'

'My mistress has given no orders to admit any particular visitor,' said the man dubiously. He waited for the card, but, behold! the gentleman could not find his card-case.

'Ah! I see how it is,' said the man-servant decisively. 'Come, sir, I can't wait here all day. You'll have to go somewhere else for what you want.'

But at this critical moment, when the door was closing, and hopes of entrance seemed at an end, the forgotten name flashed up.

'Mrs. Irwin! That's it! Mrs. Irwin!' he cried joyfully, and the man stopped.

'Tell Mrs. Irwin that Mr. Maxwell has come,' said the gentleman, stepping inside the door, which yielded.

'Well, sir,—but I expect there is some mistake.'

'There is no mistake. You need not be afraid. Mrs. Irwin expects me to luncheon. I forgot to mention that before.'

The officious man-servant came back with a crest-fallen aspect and a modest tone. 'I beg your pardon, sir. I hope you won't take it ill that I made such a blunder. You didn't speak about luncheon or I might have guessed. My mistress was looking out for you, and begs that you will step upstairs at once into her boudoir. I hope you won't ake it ill of me, sir.'

'Not at all, not at all—only doing your duty—quite ight to be careful,' said Mr. Maxwell cheerfully. 'Needful n London.'

'It really is, sir. We have such characters come, you see. ut I ought to have known. I hope you won't think it ecessary to complain to my mistress.'

'On no account; don't be uneasy,' said Mr. Maxwell, tying the young man's uneasiness. 'We all make mistakes metimes. I often do myself—very often.'

And the now grateful footman led him to a luxurious ting-room. A lady, handsomely but rather carelessly essed, sat on an ottoman. She was in mourning, grey-ired, with a careworn and not very happy face. Few ould have guessed that she was the sister of the young-oking and beautiful Mrs. Bertram; still fewer that between e two lay only ten years of difference in age.

'Mr. Maxwell,' she said eagerly, and Montgomery Max-ell, bowing, accepted the outstretched hand. Her manners ere impulsive, and lacked the high-bred ease of Mrs. ertram's.

'I believe I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Irwin once, any years ago,' he said hesitatingly.

'Ah! that was years ago indeed. But I shall always sociate you with the Manor. You seem to belong to

them all.' She used the word 'them' as people often do, without a nominative, secure of being understood. 'I seem to know you so well. John and Muriel can never tell me enough about you.'

Montgomery sat leaning thoughtfully forwards, his gaze wandering over the crimson flowers and green leaves beneath his feet.

'They have not written for some time,' he said. 'I am very anxious for news of them all, and being in London I thought I might venture to call on Mrs. Irwin, on the score of old days.'

'I assure you your letter gave me the greatest pleasure. But when did you hear last?'

'I have been trying to recollect. Two years—yes, nearly two years,' said Mr. Maxwell, looking up at the gilded cornices. 'About two years. I am not sure whether I or they wrote last. You see it is eight years since I left Claverton, and in eight years people drift apart. It is natural; it is a law of human nature,' and Montgomery's gentle eyes looked rather sorrowfully at Mrs. Irwin. 'We get fresh interests; and though the old interests don't die, they are pushed into the background. It seems to be so generally.'

'"Out of sight, out of mind," you mean. But Muriel ought to have written.'

'Muriel—O no,' said Mr. Maxwell calmly, though even Mrs. Irwin, no observant person, saw a certain strained look come into his face. The muscles on his forehead worked visibly with a quivering motion. 'Not Muriel,' he repeated; 'not more than anybody else, I mean. I have not written to her for so very long. I think—I believe—in fact, I am sure, I never answered her last, five years ago. I had a letter from Arthur lately, and he says, "You have of course heard of all the changes," but he does not mention what they are. It has made me anxious; so much may have happened in two years. What changes, Mrs. Irwin?'

She looked down at her deep crape trimmings. 'My father,' she said; 'then you did not know he was gone.'

'Mr. Rivers? No!'

'Yes! it was sudden at the last; but I was there. He asked for me.'

Mrs. Irwin shed a few tears as she spoke.

'How long ago?' asked Montgomery.

'Eight months now; and Mrs. Bertram and Muriel are at Bushby.'

'Not at Claverton? At the Manor?'

'They had to leave the Manor. That helped to break my father down more than anything. He lost heavily by the failure of a bank, and the Manor was obliged to be sold. He seemed quite crushed, and died the day before he would have had to leave his home. It was a most distressing time.'

Maxwell felt it distressing. He lost sight of Constance Irwin's presence, and paced the room with bent head and heavy step. What reverses for Muriel! How had she borne all? He longed to know, yet would not ask.

'I had no idea that all this was unknown to you,' said Mrs. Irwin at length, and he came back to his seat with a start.

'I—I beg your pardon. I am acting strangely; but, indeed, you knew all they were to me—are to me——'

'I can believe it, I assure you,' said Mrs. Irwin kindly.

'And they are living, you say, at Bushby?'

'In Elm Villa; a nice little house, close to the Vicarage. Oh, you remember it; quite buried in trees, you know. My sister has enough to keep her in comfort, though not in luxury. She has had to give up her carriage, which is a serious loss.'

'Near the Vicarage. That must be a comfort to Muriel.'

'Yes; but I am sorry to say John is in very poor health.'

'John Rivers! Not ill?'

'He has been ordered to Egypt or Australia as the only

hope. His lungs are much affected: they never were very strong; and he has been failing for months. The loss of his two boys last winter shook him a good deal.'

'Which?' murmured Mr. Maxwell.

'Anson and Georgie. Do you remember them? I never knew one of those boys from another. It was whooping-cough or measles. Then there was the failure of the bank, and my father's distress at having to give up the Manor; and John entered very keenly into it all.'

'The loss is his too.'

'Yes; but I really do not think John so much troubled himself about that. His one thought seemed to be for my father. Of course it is a serious matter to John, for, instead of being a rich man in prospect, he has nothing but his living to depend upon. It is a very good living, as livings go; still, parish and children and delicate health soon swallow up eight hundred a year. And of course he ought to lay by.'

'And Mr. Rivers never actually left the Manor?'

'No; another stroke came on, and he never rallied from it. We were all summoned, and arrived in time. He was conscious just at last, and it was a very painless death. Many of us felt it quite a mercy that he had not to go through the breaking of ties in his old age. He could never have settled into another home. The day of the funeral was very cold and wretched; all drizzle and sleet and half-thaw with a bitter wind. John looked ill before, but when he came back from the funeral he seemed chilled through and through, and was so cold and exhausted that we hardly knew what to do with him. He had a frightful cold after, bronchitis, with inflammation of the lungs. He has never lost his cough all through the summer.'

Mr. Maxwell's dejected look made her add, 'You ought to go and see them all at Bushby. My sister would gladly give you a bed.'

'Mrs. Bertram? O no! Thank you, but it would not

do at all. I should like it, but it would not do. Poor John! Poor fellow! What trials he has had! But God knows best.'

'Can you always say that, Mr. Maxwell? I cannot.'

'I have learnt to say it,—always, I hope. But long discipline was needed first. It generally is needed.'

'I am afraid discipline has not had that effect upon me,—if you mean trouble by "discipline."' She half-rose, adding, 'It is nearly time for luncheon. Will you excuse me for a few minutes?' But he plainly did not see the movement, and she waited.

'Discipline is trouble sent by God with a purpose,—for the purpose of bringing our hearts and minds into subjection.'

'Then you don't count that all trouble comes for that purpose?'

'Nay,' and he smiled. 'If I have a pupil, and see it needful to deny him certain pleasures, for the purpose of subduing in him a spirit of disobedience, *that* is discipline. If he chooses to disregard common precautions, runs his head against a wall, and half kills himself, I see no discipline in the matter. I don't say God does not use even our self-brought troubles for purposes of discipline. He does so sometimes, no doubt,—perhaps often. But there is a difference.'

'And you can always feel that God knows best.'

'He sees ahead where I cannot. That is one point. God has absolute grasp over my future, no less than over my past. While I—I see only the past, and not even that as a whole. My views are broken and disjointed. Then how reasonable, how simple a matter of fact, that God must know best.'

'You don't condemn me as very wicked not to have more faith?'

He lifted his eyes to her in surprise. 'I have not to judge, he said. 'The matter is very straightforward to me. God sees where I cannot see, and knows where I cannot know.

He can judge of my life as a whole, while I can only gather it up bit by bit as it comes. There can be no doubt as to His power and foresight. And when I remember His love, I can have no questionings as to His will. He knows what is best for me. He will do what is best for me. Not only for me, but for all whom He loves and I love.'

'But suppose He does not love?' breathed Mrs. Irwin.

'My dear Mrs. Irwin! Suppose the sun does not shine!'

Mrs. Irwin burst into tears.

'He *is* love,' said Maxwell. 'The sun may as easily cease to shine, as God cease to love—nay, more easily. For the one is possible,—the other is not. A star may cease to shine, if God wills to extinguish its blaze,—but light can never cease to be light. Love can never cease to be love. God is love. His essence cannot vary. And for the matter of our knowing His love,—poor blind creatures we are in truth, but—"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."'

'O, I should like to see more of you,' said Mrs. Irwin. 'I think you could help me. Mr. Maxwell, you ought to be a clergyman.'

'Nay, surely I may trust the love of my God, even as a layman.'

'But you might have preached.'

'We may all preach by our lives. That door was not opened to me. Had it been, I would have gladly gone in.'

'Well, I think you are a happy man,' she said, sighing deeply. 'Muriel always says so of you. I have many trials, but perhaps if I felt God's love in the way you do, they might be easier to bear.'

'No doubt, no doubt of it; I am sure they would. But the love of God can only be learnt, truly learnt, at the feet of Christ,' said Mr. Maxwell, with a wistful expression, as if he would have liked her to learn it too.

'I must go for a few minutes. Will you excuse me?'

t suddenly alone, Montgomery's thoughts did not on his hostess's needs. Like bent steel, springing hen released, he was instantly in mind at Bushby. iel stood before him, as vividly as if he had at that it seen her in bodily presence. He thought of their rting. He remembered her frank bright manner, her and unconscious bearing. He wondered whether r and bearing would be the same now.

ıe thought, he realised for the first time that the eight ning years had sunk to a mere point of time, and that rded himself the separation had been useless. She much to him as ever, nay, more than ever. He had ɔnce to meet her day after day, calmly restraining all ion of his real feelings. He could not venture it now. ıe earlier years, had old Mr. Rivers not dismissed him is tutorship, he might have long continued his inter- in the house. The parting once over, he had ined to break himself of his hopeless affection, to abroad for awhile, to contract new ties, to gain fresh s, to shake himself loose from the past.

ıad talked of three years on the Continent, but at the that time his mother died, and he had no longer any hasten home. The three years grew into eight; and ıght eight must surely be enough. A certain tutor- ming then to an end, he returned home. And now, in Mrs. Irwin's boudoir, it rushed over him that all ı been in vain. What were eight years of absence? was Muriel still. He could have lived or died for her ıat was certain. But could he endure to live *not* for —to meet her, talk to her, smile at her, treat her with ind friendliness?

ıust not go to Bushby; I must not trust myself there. any right to be in England at all? I did not know I thought I had grown calm—had conquered my art. Conquered! was I ever so weak as I am to-day, l these long long years? O Muriel—Muriel!'

His brain was burning, and his heart was beating wi the rush of old recollections; with the rising of wild desir long held down; with the passionate craving for one glimps of Muriel. Unable to sit still, he paced the room wi fevered steps. Calm? His mind was in a very tempest emotion. Yet duty still held sway.

'No, not one glimpse—not one,' he repeated. 'Wh right have I to dream of her? I, a penniless tutor, barel able to get enough for my own wants. Could I ask her t share my uncertain gains? What promise have I for the future? I am getting on in life. Suppose health failed me; would I tie her down to grinding poverty? Besides, though Mr. Rivers is gone, would her mother ever consent, even if Muriel herself were willing? Sometimes I have thought that might have been. Then separation is best for her too. She will marry well and happily—and I will rejoice for her when it is so. Yet—O Muriel! O Muriel!'

He had one resource against the burning bitter pain and sense of loneliness which had so suddenly laid their grasp upon him. Standing still in the middle of the room, he breathed a prayer for calmness. Then he went back to his seat, and a little volume, well-worn and corner-rubbed, came out of his pocket. He read it diligently, going back and back again when attention persistently wandered. He was rewarded by returning power of quiet endurance.

'"This light affliction which is but for a moment,"' he murmured. 'Yes, just so; "but for a moment." We all have our trials; one and another must be borne. But all will have an end. Just a little longer, and then! Th "moment" may seem long sometimes; but that is our im patience. God knows what is best for us; He never give one drop of pain too much.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

A WEST-END BOUDOIR.

SOMEBODY came into the room—not Mrs. Irwin. Maxwell found his hand grasped and shaken by a thin hawk-eyed man.

'How do you do? How do you do? Welcome back to England, Maxwell, after your ten years' absence.'

'Eight years—only eight. Not more I assure you. How do you do, Mr. Drummond?'

'Thanks, very well. Just come back from a Swiss tour. Everything in arrears of course from my absence, but that one must expect. I make it a rule never to disquiet myself about the inevitable. Curious your coming home in the very nick of time. I am happy to be the bearer of agreeable tidings. Allow me first to congratulate you,' and he shook Maxwell's hand with a vigour more pleasing to mind than body.

Maxwell thought he had heard enough news of an opposite nature that day. 'Your note showed me that you had something to say,' he remarked. 'I could not gather the nature of the communication.'

'Well, no, I did not mean you to do that. I wished rather for the pleasure of telling you myself. Most opportunely I called here when Mrs. Irwin had just received your first note, and when she heard we were old friends she immediately proposed to have us both to luncheon. I could not get across to you yesterday, and you would not come to me.'

'Could not,' interpolated Maxwell. 'Indeed I had much

to do. I only reached London the day before. But you had to tell me——'

'Just so,' responded the garrulous solicitor, laying two fingers on a button of the other's coat. 'Allow me once more most sincerely to congratulate you. You are of course aware that your cousin, John Holmes, is dead.'

'John Holmes! Indeed, no; I was not aware of it. How sad! You must have thought it strange not to see me in mourning.'

'Why, he has not been the best of friends to you.'

'That could make no possible difference. He was my near relative. Poor fellow! I am sorry, very sorry,' repeated Maxwell, sighing. 'So many changes. It makes a man dread returning home after long absence. Everything seems altered. But it is all right—even where one can't see. Everything is well. How about the young cousin that John Holmes adopted?'

'She had rather a hard life, I am afraid, but she married and went to America three years ago, against his will. She has been lost sight of.'

'And you call all this good news?' said Maxwell reproachfully.

'He died intestate,' said the lawyer in a quiet tone.

'Ah, I am sorry for that. Intestate you say? I am surprised. We all thought he would make a will in favour of that young girl. Poor thing! she will be disappointed. It is not a large property, certainly, still she may have been expecting it. ' Perhaps she offended him by marrying.'

'Very possibly,' said the lawyer. 'He may have destroyed the will.'

'In that case it will pass to the heir-at-law,' continued Maxwell mildly. 'After all, this seems more just, more reasonable.'

'I am glad you feel it so,' said Mr. Drummond, with some dryness. 'Perhaps you forget who *is* the heir-at-law, Mr Maxwell.'

Maxwell thought for some seconds and suddenly gave a start.

'I—I quite forgot at the moment. I certainly did count myself his heir-at-law many years ago. I am his nearest relative. But for twenty years I have never given the matter a glance in connection with myself—the estrangement has been so complete. Yet I may truly say that I have never had any ill-feeling towards my poor cousin. It was his will, not mine, that kept us apart.'

'Family quarrels are odious things. But you were not to blame in this, as every one knows, and the matter has come straight at last. Your cousin having died intestate, his possessions are yours.'

Maxwell stood like a man in a dream.

'A natty little house and garden, and six or seven hundred a year—not to be despised nowadays,' said Mr. Drummond. 'Sell the meadowland near the river for building, and you may make your seven hundred into a thousand in no time.'

'You are quite sure there is no will?' said Maxwell.

Mr. Drummond laughed. 'Not a shadow of doubt. Come, have I kept my promise of good news?'

Maxwell's gaze went out of the window. He felt shaken, and longed for a quiet hour. 'I am very thankful,' he said, 'very thankful. I hardly understand it, but God's bounties are so great, just when least expected. It is more than I deserve.'

'Your friends may differ from yourself as to your deserts. But I assure you I am heartily pleased for you.'

The luncheon-bell sounded, and Mrs. Irwin came in. Montgomery hardly knew where he was, or what he was doing. Not that the actual possession of so much money more or less would have very deeply affected him. But other things followed in the train of this change in his worldly circumstances.

As they passed through the hall towards the dining-room, the footman was observed to shut the front door somewhat

sharply, as if disposing of a troublesome visitor. He came away with a note in his hand, of curious rough pink paper, oddly folded, without an envelope. Mrs. Irwin asked carelessly, 'For me, Thomas?'

'Yes, ma'am. The same young person who has been before. She insisted on my taking this, though I told her it was useless, and in an hour or two she will call for an answer.'

Mrs. Irwin turned away indifferently.

'I have nothing to say to her, Thomas. You have orders already that she is not to be admitted. When she comes return her the letter.'

Mr. Irwin was waiting in the drawing-room—an over-stout and red-faced person, with too much the air of a moneyed man, though not otherwise than a gentleman. Montgomery had a passing idea that in this direction lay probably one of Mrs. Irwin's troubles. He had to undergo renewed congratulations on the score of his altered prospects, communicated to host and hostess by Mr. Drummond.

'Divisions in your family too,' Mrs. Irwin remarked with a suppressed sigh.

'It was a division all on one side,' said the lawyer.

'Poor John was not of a happy temperament. He believed he had cause for annoyance,' explained Mr. Maxwell.

'And your home will be now—where did you say?'

'Twenty minutes by express from Claverton—from Bushby, I mean.'

'And five minutes only from your house to the station,' said Mr. Drummond. 'A brisk little place to live in—quite up to the mark—growing fast from a village into a town.'

'I am surprised to find Mr. Maxwell in no haste to visit Bushby,' said Mrs. Irwin.

Montgomery blushed. 'I had my doubts. But I think—under present circumstances—that a visit would be as well. I should like to see John Rivers again. Yes, I must certainly see him again before he leaves England. I could not be happy to let him go without.'

Conversation was not easy to keep up, so far as Mont-
omery was concerned. He answered vaguely or not at
ll, finished eating nothing that he began, and the moment
ncheon was over showed a strong disposition to make his
scape—a wild notion having seized him that he might get to
ushby that day. This seemed likely to be frustrated. He
ound Mrs. Irwin bent on retaining him for another chat, and
Ir. Drummond no less bent on some business conversation.
Iontgomery resigned himself submissively to both, but
ained little from either.

'I shall have to see you again in a day or two,' said Mr.
)rummond, at length giving up the matter in despair.

'I believe it would be best,—in a few days. My mind is
ardly free to enter into details to-day. I have so much to
ink about.'

Mr. Drummond shrugged his shoulders, and they went back
the drawing-room. Montgomery could not be induced
sit down again. He said good-bye dreamily, and drew a
eath of relief at finding himself outside the front door.

'At last!' he said aloud.

It was a breezy afternoon, sunshiny and exhilarating.
ontgomery pulled out his watch, regretfully decided that
hopes of reaching Bushby that afternoon mnst be given
), and began pacing up and down the broad pavement, a
nse of freedom and thankful light-heartedness stealing over
m. He found himself realising the change in his life.
) longer a penniless tutor. No longer forced to grind out
s living by daily toil. He had enough and to spare. He
ight taste the sweetness of helping others now. That
ought came pleasantly, and with it a sense of renewed
atitude to his Father in heaven. There was a childlike-
ss of simplicity in his manner of mind and manner of faith.
e frankly rejoiced in the change which had come over his
e, and he joyously acknowledged that this change was his
ather's doing.

'His gift to me—His gift; so little deserved. But it

comes from Him. How truly I see it so. He lifts up one and puts down another. Why am *I* chosen out to have this ease and plenty showered upon me, any more than that poor careworn fellow opposite? Such a rusty coat! Well, so has mine been often. It has not been always quite easy to get along the last two or three years. But my Father knew it all the while, and was preparing comfort for me. If only others were as well off. It is sad to be in pleasant circumstances oneself, and to remember others' distress.'

But Muriel, Muriel! His thoughts went there.

Why not?

The thing was no longer an absolute impossibility. He was no longer conscientiously debarred from taking a step in the matter. Muriel was no longer rich. He was no longer poor.

Nearly twenty-four years he had known Muriel. Nearly half that time he had known his own mind about Muriel, and had known it hopelessly. Now hope sprang up.

'What if Mrs. Irwin writes and says I am coming? I would rather take them all by surprise. I would rather see Muriel's first expression, before she has time for thought. Why did I not get off in time for the train? Too late now. Why not travel by the night-train, and get in before the early post?'

It was an odd idea, highly characteristic of the individual. Montgomery saw nothing singular, however, in the notion of startling his friends by an unexpected appearance at seven or eight in the morning. Being a man of impulse he immediately resolved on a dash for the nearest cab-stand, and a rapid drive to his lodgings, whence he could with bag or portmanteau speedily depart. But at this moment he happened to be again passing the Irwins' house, and his attention was caught by a certain young girl coming down the broad steps. She had an old-fashioned large summer cloak wrapped round her slender figure, and a worn little bonnet on her head. The face inside the bonnet was not

common. Montgomery had a sudden and good view of it, and he started involuntarily forward, as if to claim an old acquaintance. Before she saw the movement, he had recollected himself and paused.

What did it mean? The features, the eyes, the disdainful bearing of the small head,—he knew them all. Only Muriel Bertram had never been quite so dark or quite so lovely as this young foreign-looking creature, at once bashful and haughty in her air.

Montgomery did not know how earnestly he was looking at her, till she lifted her eyes to his. A startled blush rose to her cheeks, and she turned aside with a quick movement, as if shrinking from observation. The next moment the little head was reined up again with resolute dignity, and she went slowly past, without giving a second glance. Montgomery's road lay in the same direction as hers, but he did not move till she had gone some paces. By that time she had apparently forgotten him. He saw her cross the road and stand looking through the railings at some children playing in the square-garden. Then the head was bent, the hands were wrung together, and a convulsive sob reached his ears.

Montgomery had hard work to abstain from speaking. For a moment he lingered uncertainly, and while he was debating with himself she turned and walked slowly away, an air of deep depression bending the slight figure till it looked ten years older than a minute before. As she went, something slipped from her hands and lay on the ground, unnoticed by her. Montgomery had it in a moment. Short-sighted as he was, and so strictly honourable that he would have shrunk from giving an intentional look, yet the bold irregular writing of the address, 'Mrs. Irwin,' struck him instantly; while the peculiar pink colour of the paper, and the singular shape in which it was folded, recalled the letter which he had seen in the footman's hand before luncheon. Montgomery did not usually show himself so quick to re-

member and associate, but for once his faculties were thoroughly on the alert. A few hasty strides brought him to the young girl's side.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. 'You dropped this.'

She turned to him a face pale as a sheet, quivering with a half-childish look of intense distress. But the moment her eyes met his the same flush rose in her cheeks, the same straightening of figure took place, and with a haughty 'I thank you,' she received it, bent her head in acknowledgment, turned down a side-street, and went rapidly on her way.

'Muriel's gesture, precisely,' murmured Maxwell. 'Strange—strange—strange! Who can she be?'

He had little time to lose, if bent on catching the last train, and bent on it he undoubtedly was. Yet he moved onwards with increasing slowness, and at length came to a standstill. An uneasy sense was on him that he might have said and done more, that a case of distress might be involved. Mrs. Irwin had plainly refused her help in the matter.

Montgomery turned and hurried back at speed, but he hurried in vain. The young girl was nowhere to be seen. He walked far down the side-street, without avail. Giving the matter up at length he returned once more to the main road.

There an idea struck him. What if he went to Mrs. Irwin and inquired particulars?

Montgomery pulled out his watch. Just time to catch his train and no more. The loss of ten minutes would probably cause the loss of his train.

It was no easy matter to decide. Bushby drew him strongly, so strongly that he hardly knew how to endure delay. He had set his heart on taking his friends by surprise. This supposed distress of somebody was after all mere matter of conjecture. It might turn out to be nothing On his return to London he could inquire of Mrs. Irwin, and there was probably no particular hurry.

r the influence of his own fervent wishes, Mont-
found himself striding in the direction whither
ıations led him. But he was not a man to let self-
carry the day. He soon came again to a standstill.
t am I thinking about? What need for me to start
? There *is* need written in that young thing's face.
; my love to my neighbour?'
minutes brought him to Mrs. Irwin's door. She
ɜ out, but would be back, probably, in half-an-hour.
nery resigned himself to wait.
r a person—a young lady—leave this door—about a
ıf-an-hour ago or more,' he said meditatively to the
'Is she the same who brought the letter before
ı?'
s, sir. My mistress desired me to return the letter,'
man, concealing surprise at the question.
don't happen to know her name, or where she lives?'
not, sir. She has been once or twice before, beg-
assistance, I imagine. Once the young person's
ame, and my mistress desired me to show her out
ɔuse, and spoke of her as an impostor. But I am
ainted with particulars.'
young thing is no impostor—no, no—not possible,'
ɛd Montgomery. 'With that face——'
is pretty, sir, but she has a furrin way with her,' said
. 'My mistress discourages all impostors, sir.'
ell had a faint sense that poverty and imposture
onymous terms in this household. He was shown
library, and there sat down to bide his time. No
the night train.
, well, there are worse evils than a day's delay,'
l Maxwell, looking round him at the solid furniture
rows of well-bound unread books. He fell into a
th his two hands on the head of his stick, and his
ing on the backs of his hands.
ge thing life—life lived out day by day—we poor

blind mortals stumbling on, never seeing a pace ahead. All the changes that come in a few years,—one dead, one living,—circumstances so different. The poor becoming rich; the rich becoming poor. Either way it is well, if God so wills it. How easy for me to say that now. Could I have felt the same if not gain, but loss, had been my portion? Aye, surely, God helping me. I have known loss. And loss may be still awaiting me. How do I know? What will money signify, if my heart's desire is still denied me? Can it be safely granted? Would Muriel be more to me than all in earth and heaven beside? Nay, not now,' and he looked up, smiling. 'There was a time when she might have grown to be so. Well that I did not have her then. But not now. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." He shall be my portion for ever. Life without Muriel,—I can face the thought. It would be pain and shadow, but it would be life still. Life without Christ,—nay, *that* would be death. My God, I thank Thee that it is so. And if she is denied me still? If she is never in this world to be mine?'

He waited to look the thought in the face. A shiver crept over him, yet once more he smiled.

'The trial may be sent. What though I feel that Christ is dearer to me than all? Maybe I have to be put to the test. Maybe I am self-deceiving. Maybe my Master would have me so to honour Him. Then so be it. "Even so, Father,"—if it seem good in Thy sight.'

Maxwell's half-hour in the library was not lost. His being there was better for him than if he had been hurrying at express speed towards Bushby. When Mrs. Irwin entered he rose with his usual gentle and preoccupied air, all excitement having left him.

'Again, Mr. Maxwell. I did not expect this pleasure so soon.'

Montgomery explained the object of his return. She listened with some amusement.

'We do not think so much of respectable-looking beggars n London,' she said, laughing. 'They are the pest of one's ife. But this one seems to have struck you from her likeness to Muriel.'

'That certainly was the primary cause.'

'It is singular, your noticing the likeness,' said Mrs. Irwin, after slight hesitation. 'I have not seen the girl, but I have seen the mother. There may, after all, be some truth in her tale.'

'What tale?'

'She came here six months ago or more, and insisted on an interview, professing to be a relative of my sister's husband. A common sort of person, and evidently very sickly and poor, as well as very disagreeable. I took her for an impostor, and refused to listen to her tale, which put her into a terrible passion. I gave orders that she was never to be admitted, and I suppose she was soon after taken ill, for I heard nothing more till a few weeks ago, when this girl called and asked to see me. She had the impertinence to send in her name as "Miss Bertram."'

'But if that really is her name——'

'I don't believe it is. Besides, the idea of *Miss* Bertram —people of that class! Though really I believe our housemaids and cooks call themselves "Miss" in these days. I declined to see her, and soon after she brought a note from the mother, and left it,—a regular begging epistle. I put it into the fire, and sent no answer. To-day, as you see, they have made another attempt. I am quite determined to have nothing to do with them.'

'You say you did not once see the young girl herself?'

'No, I did not feel disposed. I found the interview with the mother quite sufficient.'

'And their name is Bertram? Bertram! How strange!'

'So the woman declares. I have always looked upon it as a hatched-up tale.'

'Do you happen to know what relationship she claims?

I was not aware that there were any relatives on the Bertra side."

'I can't say that. My sister's husband had one brothe many years younger than himself. He was in a differen presidency from my sister and her husband, and after he marriage the brothers never met. My sister strongly oppose all intercourse, and since Captain Bertram's death, she ha dropped all connection with the family. This woman pro fesses to be widow of the younger brother. It may be so— I do not know—but in any case she has no claim on m sister. The woman has pressed persistently for her ad dress, but I should not of course think of giving it, no would you.

'No, certainly not—certainly not,' said Maxwell. 'It woul not be what Mrs. Bertram would wish.'

'You could hardly bring a greater calamity on her tha to introduce any of her husband's family to Bushby. You know what they are, and how she feels about the matter.'

'True, true; we must be careful. But I should like t find out if these poor people are in actual want. You see, might give them a little help, without even alluding to Mrs Bertram as a friend of mine. Could you direct me where t find them?'

Mrs. Irwin's answer was at first a negative. She had de stroyed one letter and returned the other. But she had singularly quick memory for names and numbers, and rathe unwillingly she was obliged to confess, while speaking on th subject, that the address had come back to her mind.

'One's memory is not often too good,' she said. 'But hardly ever forget a person's direction, after once seeing i written. I wish I could have forgotten this. The less tha any of us have to do with those people the better.' Sh scribbled it on a card, however, and Montgomery's objec was attained.

'One thing more,' he said, when rising to bid good-bye 'You will be writing to Bushby perhaps to-day or to-morrow

not mention my name. I should prefer to take
' surprise, and to carry my own news.'
are just in time with your request,' said Mrs. Irwin,
;, ' I meant to write to my sister before dinner, and
end her to invite you.'
do not.' And on receiving her promise, he felt as
ı been rewarded for his self-denial. Had he gone by
ıt train, Mrs. Irwin's letter must almost inevitably
ıched Mrs. Bertram before he had seen her, whether
. previous interview with John Rivers or even with
ıad been possible. Mrs. Bertram was always a late

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A POOR LODGING.

In an upstairs room of a shabby house in a narrow back London street, not far from the West-end mansions of the rich, a woman lay upon a flock bed. She had over her a torn counterpane, and a strip of faded carpet partly covered the floor. A rough deal table, one chair, a rickety chest of drawers, and a small bench, upon which stood a cracked basin and a broken ewer, completed the furniture. The table was near the bed, and bore a mug of water. On the window-sill was a pot containing a scarlet geranium, the brilliant colouring of which set off only the more painfully the poverty of all around.

The woman in bed had a foreign appearance. Her jet-black hair, knotted carelessly behind, added to the sickliness of her sallow and sunken cheeks, while her large prominent black eyes had in them a craving restlessness, as of one who had sought and never found, and every line in the face told either of keen sufferings or of passions unsubdued.

At the foot of the bed stood the same slender dark-eyed girl seen by Montgomery Maxwell near Mrs. Irwin's house. She looked weary and dejected, and traces of tears showed on her cheeks. It was nearly an hour since her return, and her mother had been angrily excited at the failure of her mission. Most of the anger was directed against Mrs. Irwin, but the young girl had her own ample share of blame for not acting with more determination and persistency. 'I couldn't, mother; I could not,' she said deprecatingly one

or twice. But the woman fretted and scolded on, till there came a gentle tap at the door.

'It's Mr. Brown,' said the mother. 'You may tell him, Pauline, it's no manner of use his coming. I haven't a sixpence for the rent.'

Pauline opened the door, but no Mr. Brown stood outside. She found herself facing a gentle-mannered man, with shy lips moving nervously before he ventured to say, 'Does a Mrs. Bertram live here?'

Pauline's 'Yes,' was blunt. She recognised the visitor, and distrusted him. Her very beauty and unprotectedness had caused her to learn early to stand on the defensive.

'Could I have a few words with Mrs. Bertram? I believe her to be in trouble, and I—I am acquainted with Mrs. Irwin.'

He had not meant to say this. Thinking the matter over, he had decided that such an avowal might possibly lead to the fact that he also knew Mrs. Bertram of Bushby. But the remark slipped out naturally at the moment.

Pauline stepped back. 'Mother, it is somebody from Mrs. Irwin.'

'Bring him in,' a voice said, unhesitating in its English, though with a foreign touch in its intonation.

Montgomery entered, bending his head courteously, and accepting the chair offered by Pauline. He would not seem to draw attention to the fact of there being but a single chair, by offering it back to Pauline. She stood leaning against the side of the window.

'I beg your pardon—I must not let you misunderstand me,' said Mr. Maxwell gravely. 'I do not come from Mrs. Irwin, in the sense of being her messenger; but I—I saw your letter returned to-day, and I gathered the fact of your being in trouble,—perhaps—pardon me—in need.'

His sensitive caution was rather thrown away as regarded the mother.

'We have spent our last sixpence, and eaten our last bit of bread to-day,' she said promptly. 'If that isn't need, I don't

know what is. And where the next is to come from Pauline doesn't know any more than me. And there are those who are near of kin to us—Pauline's own blood-relations—not willing to lift a finger to help us; no, not one little finger.'

'Do you mean Mrs. Irwin?' asked Maxwell.

'No, I don't mean Mrs. Irwin. She's hard as iron, if you will, but it isn't Mrs. Irwin that stands nearest,' said the woman, with growing excitement. Montgomery found himself wondering what her grade in life might originally have been. It was not easy to guess whether she had risen or sunk since her marriage. A certain inequality of manner seemed to denote either one or the other.

'Not Mrs. Irwin,' she repeated, 'though Mrs. Irwin might help and won't. But there's one of my own name—a Mrs. Bertram, widow to my husband's only brother. Isn't that close enough? She is Pauline's aunt, and her children, if she has any, are Pauline's cousins. And I have written twice—three times—to Mrs. Bertram, since I have become so poor. She used to live in a place called Claverton, in a Manor-house that belonged to her father. I wrote twice, nearly a year ago, and I got no answer. Then I waited awhile, and wrote again, and the letter came back. It had been opened, and fastened up again, and somebody had written outside: "No such person living in Claverton." And that gives me hope, for if I could find her she might be softer now,—might be—though, perhaps, it isn't likely. But I don't know where she lives; and I can't get Mrs. Irwin to tell me. I know Mrs. Irwin is Mrs. Bertram's sister, though she won't allow that, nor anything else, but treats me like a mere cheat, and won't even hear me speak. I know it—for my husband gave me her address, as well as the address to Claverton Manor. He made me learn them by heart, only he told me never to use them if I could help it. He said Mrs. Bertram was that proud she wouldn't wish to touch me and Pauline with a pair of tongs.'

'Had he any particular reason for supposing so?' asked

Montgomery, wondering as soon as he had spoken why he had asked the question.

'I believe Mrs. Bertram is what you people in England call "good family,"' said the woman, with a flash of her black eyes. 'My husband and her husband had some native blood running in their veins, and James was none the worse husband to me for that. As good-natured a man as ever breathed he was, though I troubled him sorely with my temper. And O, hadn't he a handsome face? Pauline's the very image of him, though she takes after me, too, in some things. She's a good-looking little girl, don't you think so? And I can tell you I was beautiful once, though you mayn't think it of me now.'

Maxwell had a faint inclination to smile. 'You are not English,' he said.

'No, I'm not, and I don't want to be. The English are hard and proud—O so hard. My mother was a Portuguese by family, only she had always lived in India, and my father was a half-caste. So James and I were better matched than poor Arthur and his proud wife. We lost him quite after his marriage. No, I haven't much of English blood in me. My mother died young, and my bringing up was at the Cape under an old Frenchwoman. James loved England though, and liked to count himself all English, and I tried to be English to please him. We sent Pauline to a school in England quite young, and when my husband died, four years ago, I came home to her. Mrs. Bertram must have seen his death in the newspapers, but I don't suppose she ever tried to find out whether he had left wife or children. I don't suppose she wanted to know, and I didn't want her to know, as long as I could get along. But it has been hard work. I'm not used to English ways, and I have had pain and suffering—ah, so much.'

'Then you have no pension?'

'No, my husband wasn't in the army. He was in coffee.*

* Colloquial expression, signifying 'in the coffee-plantation business.'

And he never got on. We just managed to live and to pa our way, but we didn't lay by much. We meant to hav Pauline out when she was seventeen, and we were sure sh would marry well. But James had a fancy against her goin out earlier, and I couldn't run against his fancies when h was gone, and I couldn't afford her schooling any longe She is only fifteen and a half now, though you wouldn't thin it, to look at her. I came to England, and didn't mean t stay more than a few years, for India is my home. But shall never go out again. The doctors tell me I'm a dyin woman. It is a terrible thing to hear, and what is to becom of Pauline when I am gone, I don't know.'

'"A Father of the fatherless . . . is God in His ho habitation,"' Montgomery quoted, using for her comfort th promise which John Rivers had used for his own. She gav him a curious searching look.

'Ah, you remind me of a gentleman I saw on board shi coming to England. He was very religious, very religious He used to make me feel quite miserable and wretched, so always kept away from him as much as I could. I never wa religious—I've been too busy, and it isn't my way. But it a comfort anyhow to think that when I die I'll see Jame again. He was a good husband to me, and never woul quarrel, though I plagued him many a time with my tempe I'm not sulky and sullen like some folks—I would scorn t be *that*, or to bear malice. But I am hasty I know, an say sharp things.'

'Mrs. Bertram, are you quite sure that you will meet you husband again when you die?' asked Montgomery slowly after shaping the question many ways in his own mind.

'See my James again! Why, you don't mean to say you' have me think he hasn't gone to heaven!' exclaimed Mrs Bertram, with eyes aglow. 'The kindest-hearted bes tempered man that ever lived.'

'I did not know your husband. I never saw him, and hope all may have been well with him. If he served Go

on earth, he is with God now. But I am thinking about yourself,' said Montgomery, with added gentleness. 'Are you quite sure you are on the road to heaven?'

'I never was asked such a question before,' she said, with a short uneasy laugh. 'Me! Why, to hear you, one might think I was a thief or a drunkard. I've been as good a wife and mother as most—better than some.'

'And how about serving God?'

Mrs. Bertram was silent. Her fingers picked uneasily at the counterpane.

'I dare say you feel afraid sometimes. Many people do when they think of the end of this life—strong people as well as sick ones.'

'Well, I don't say a feeling doesn't come over me now and then—mostly when I am lying awake at nights,' she said with a shiver. 'It looks so black in front—black and steep, like a great plunge down, one doesn't know where. I feel dreadful sometimes. I should like to be sure all was right, and I could wish I had been more religious. But there! it isn't my way. It isn't as if I had been so bad either. I don't see what need I have to be frightened. After all, folks are what God made them, and they can't help it or make themselves different.'

'Nay, Mrs. Bertram. Too many people are what sin and Satan have made them. God made man in His own likeness, and His will is to restore man to His own likeness. True enough, we cannot change ourselves, but the Spirit of God can and will change us, if we believe in Christ, and submit to the Spirit's working. If we will to remain what Satan—*not* God—has made us, then the fault, the blame, is ours.'

He spoke slowly, weighing his words as he proceeded.

'That is like the gentleman on board ship. He was always and for ever talking about sin,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'I told him it wasn't me he meant, for I never did anything so very particular to be ashamed of.'

'Never anything wrong?'

'I've done wrong things sometimes, like other folks,' she said, looking out of the window. 'Nobody is perfect, I suppose. I wouldn't even say I have never done what might be called sin——'

And Montgomery, watching intently, saw the shadow of some dark recollection creep over her haggard face.

'But I don't see why I need fear. I've suffered enough since to atone for worse deeds ten times over than any I ever did, and shed tears enough to wash any guilt of mine away. God knows—and if you knew what I've gone through, you would say the same. My sufferings the last four years will plead for me, and God is merciful.'

'That word is true,' said Montgomery. 'Merciful and loving He is to the worst of sinners. But—bodily sufferings atone for sin!—tears wash away guilt! My poor friend, you are leaning on a rotten staff indeed.'

'You don't know—you don't know one half I have had to bear,' she said passionately. 'My pain of body this last year has been one long misery. I tell you, if God is merciful, then all I have borne must atone for any little wrong-doings in my life.'

Montgomery looked sorrowfully at her. He drew out his pocket-Bible, turned to the seventeenth of Leviticus, and read aloud impressively—

'"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: *for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.*"'

Without comment he opened at the ninth of Hebrews, and read:

'"Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and *without shedding of blood is no remission.*"

'That is, no passing by, no covering over, no forgiving of sin, without that death on the Cross, to which the sacrifices of the altar pointed. Mrs. Bertram, where is your atoning blood?'

The question seemed to bewilder her. It had no answer. After a pause he went on quietly—

'It does not do to argue out a question from a wrong standpoint. Suppose I were very poor, and owed you a debt of a hundred pounds. And suppose I were to say, "I have not a hundred pounds to pay Mrs. Bertram with, but I have a hundred bits of brass and tin that I have got together with great pain and difficulty, and I believe Mrs. Bertram to be of a merciful disposition. If she doesn't consent to take the hundred bits of brass and tin in payment of my debt, she must be cruel and hard indeed."'

An appreciative glow came to the face of the girl in the window. Montgomery had almost forgotten her, and had quite forgotten Muriel, in the desire to bring some light to this dark soul.

'I will tell you what would make it worse,' he went on. 'Suppose a kind friend offered to pay the hundred pounds for me, and thus to set me free, under certain conditions. And suppose I were to say, "Oh, I can't be troubled with these conditions, I must be free to please myself. Here are the hundred bits of brass and tin, and if Mrs. Bertram is kind and merciful, she is sure to accept them."'

Silence still. The sick woman gave him a look now and then, and seemed to listen, but she made no reply.

He turned to his Bible again, reading this time from the seventh of Revelation:

'"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

'They had great sorrows, but no sorrows of their own brought them into heaven. They shed many tears, but no human tears made those robes white. Tears! how are your tears to touch your soul, with its dark stains? Rivers of

tears could not wash them away. Blood—the blood of Jesus alone—can ever cleanse from sin. Till you have been to that blood-fountain, you can never go through heaven's door.'

The very gentleness of the man made his words the more emphatic. A strange look crossed Mrs. Bertram's eyes, and she breathed more quickly. But she did not give the manner of answer for which he had hoped.

'Thank you; it is just the sort of way the other gentleman used to talk. I heard him many a time. You see, the one thing I do want, sir, is to get hold of Mrs. Bertram. And if you know Mrs. Irwin and could help me to it you'd do a deed of charity, and God would reward you for it. Mrs. Bertram mightn't have so very much to say to me, but I shan't trouble anybody long, and she is rich, and my Pauline wouldn't disgrace any home.'

'Mrs. Bertram is not rich any longer,' Montgomery said dreamily, forgetting his prudence.

The woman gave a start, and then controlled herself, a half-cunning glitter coming into her eyes.

'Not rich, but able to help folks as poor as us,' she said cautiously.

'Perhaps so—yes.'

'And she doesn't live in Claverton Manor still?'

'Not for eight months past.'

'Ah, that's how it is my letters were returned,' said Mrs. James Bertram. 'And she has come to live in London now?'

'No, not in London—no.'

'No, she would be likely to stay near her old home,' said the woman musingly.

'Just so—yes,' said Montgomery mildly, falling into the trap.

'And her direction is——'

This was too near the mark, and Maxwell woke up.

'I think I must not give you her address, without knowing whether it would be agreeable to her. I must take time

o consider. I hope to see her in the course of a day or wo, and——'

'And you will speak a kind word for us?'

'Perhaps so—if I find an opportunity,' Montgomery nswered slowly, with the sense that such an utterance would ather militate against the object of his visit. 'But now, efore I leave, we must think what I can do for you. You re in difficulty—in want——'

'We've eaten our last to-day,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'How have you managed to get on so long?'

She flushed with a red glow on her sallow cheeks. 'I adn't much money after our voyage, but I had some jewels hat James gave me. I have parted with them one by one. They kept us going a good while. I got some work to do ometimes, for I knew that could not last much longer, and nce I took to giving French lessons. A lady helped me o find a pupil or two. She took to us, because of Pauline's ace. But I could not keep my temper over teaching, and hen she got vexed with me, and gave us up. We have had o friends for a long time, and I knew we were soon coming o want, so we have put up with this miserable room for three months. It *is* miserable.'

Montgomery laid a gold coin in her hand. It was as much as he could possibly spare at that moment, for though increase of income was assured, it had not yet begun.

'I will come again soon,' he said, 'as soon as I return from Bushby.'

Again the black hard eyes gave a flash.

'Are you going soon, sir?'

'To-morrow, in all probability—yes, to-morrow.'

'And you won't be gone long?'

'I cannot say; no, not long. I must certainly be back in London soon again, if it is only for one night. But I will ask a medical men to call upon you, and to keep me informed if there should be need pressing. I must say good-bye.'

He took her hand, and then paused, looking at her anxiously.

'Let me beg you not to leave the matter of your own safety in uncertainty,' he said. 'Forgive my speaking, but *there* at least need presses. It would, if you were in perfect health. We never know when the call may come. Pray that the Holy Spirit may open your eyes, may lead you to Christ.'

She listened patiently as it seemed, but the door was hardly closed behind him before she said aloud:

'Bushby! Bushby! That was what he said. Write down the word this moment, Pauline. But I shan't forget; I know the name. "Claverton, near Bushby," was the address. And Bushby is where she lives now.'

'Mother, we don't really know—and if it is, he did not mean to tell us.'

'I dare say not, but it is what I wanted to know. Bushby! He said she hadn't gone far from Claverton, and that is it. We shall find her now, easy enough.'

'You are not thinking of going there, mother?'

'Just what I am,' she said, with a cynical laugh. 'And a fine welcome we shall have from your aunt. She's your own aunt, mind that. It is a blood-relation. It can't be done away with, and I see through her ways too, though he didn't.'

'See through what?'

Pauline stood upright at the foot of the bed, looking straight at her mother. She had been long years separated from this mother, and had divided feelings about her. Pauline was in many respects a complete English girl, not more than an English school-girl in age, though in knowledge of the world a woman.

'Why, about those letters that I wrote. Two of them were sent more than eight months ago, when she was at the Manor still, and I suppose she just burnt them. The other has come back since. She thought that would quite take me in, but I see through it all now. Of course the letter went after her, and she sent it back. You need not make

that look at me, Pauline, for I know it all. O, she is a fine sort of person, this aunt of yours. But I mean to be up to her.'

'I don't want to go to Bushby. I can't bear to go to people who don't want us,' cried Pauline.

'Then they will have to make it worth our while to go away again.'

'O, mother, don't, there's no need. This gentleman will be a good friend to us I am sure—I am quite sure. Mother, you will wait,' pleaded Pauline. 'I shouldn't wonder if he were to put us in the way of getting along somehow. I could work, you know, if I had something to do.'

'It isn't for myself, child,' said Mrs. Bertram, with a certain softening of manner. 'It is all for you. I can't live long, and you are too young and too pretty to be left alone. I must manage for you, and there's nothing else to be done. Perhaps your aunt will take to you when she sees you.'

'But we can wait a little, just to see what this gentleman will do. He is very kind. I did not like him at first, but I do now. He seems so good.'

'He is kind, but he's innocent. He's as innocent as a child, though his hair is turning grey.'

'He knows more than we do. Mother, didn't you feel strange when he talked to you like that?'

'I am not going to think about it. There's no need, for I know as much as him about things. Pauline, just you go out and get a railway-book from a shop, and see where Bushby is.'

Pauline rose slowly.

'But we can't go to Bushby,' she said, with sudden hope. 'We have no money for the journey.'

'Don't you trouble. I'll settle all that,' responded Mrs. Bertram. 'We are not going to-day. But you are to get the book.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE INMATES OF THE MANOR.

THE glowing afternoon sun of early autumn beat hotly down upon the well-mown lawn of Claverton Manor, and streamed in coloured rays through the hall window of painted glass, lending purple and red streaks to the silent organ, which, like many a human being as silent, had a voice, if but the right touch came to draw it out. Those same streaks lay over the two solid oaken chairs, standing on either side of the fire-place; and falling on the glass case of stuffed birds they drew ruby and emerald beauties from humming-birds whose little day of life was over. There was always a look of repose and dignity about this lofty hall, reaching up through the floor above to the roof of the house, with Gothic window-like openings from the first story gallery. Gay laughter and noisy children would have seemed somewhat incongruous.

The library lying beyond, with large bow-windows looking out three ways upon the back-garden, was sheltered from the afternoon sun, though it had plenty of sunlight through morning hours. A room commonly takes its character pretty much from the character of its master. The private study of old Mr. Rivers, former owner of the Manor, had been counted a gloomy place, despite its large windows and general airiness. The library of Ernest Wentworth was the admiration of all who saw it.

A good many did see it, for Ernest Wentworth and his sister Rachel made this their common sitting-room, and visitors were often shown into it in preference to the drawing-

room. Ernest rarely sat alone here. More commonly, as on this particular afternoon, while he was busy with books or papers at his table in one window, Rachel was equally busy with work at her table in another window. Neither of the two was a hindrance to the other.

The library contained its old furniture as in the days of Mr. Rivers, but it had undergone certain changes. The sombre walls had been re-papered, and their present crimson and gold were relieved by tasteful pictures. The heavy red curtains had been exchanged for white muslin over silver-grey. A stand of luxuriant fuchsias stood in the middle window, and two or three light cane easy-chairs showed that the room was no longer to be regarded as exclusively a gentleman's study.

Mr. Wentworth looked young for his three-and-thirty years. He was not peculiarly handsome, but there were many besides his sister who counted him good-looking. He had a fresh though pale complexion, frank straightforward grey eyes, a forehead of no particular development but not lacking in moderate height, a good-humoured mouth, a ready smile, and an abundance of curly brown hair. A certain paucity of whisker and moustache may have contributed to his boyishly youthful appearance. Also he was a man upon whom life's cares had sat lightly.

Rachel Wentworth, his five years' senior, was a plain copy of her brother, being short and square in build, and having just that wanting in her face which entirely redeemed his from any tendency to the commonplace. Also, while his manners were extremely gentlemanly, even polished, the direct simplicity of hers amounted almost to ungainliness. As Mrs. Bertram would have said, she had 'no manner at all.' Mr. Wentworth sometimes described her as 'an upright and downright sort of person.'

Manner or no manner, the two were thoroughly happy together. Rachel seriously believed that this brother of hers had not in all the world his peer, and Ernest reposed in

Rachel unflagging trust. They had been left orphans earl and had been all in all to each other. Probably Ernest ha had his dreams of another companionship besides that of h sister, but if so his dreams had waited long for fulfilmen Rachel, the grand-daughter of an earl, and possessor of r mean portion, might have married again and again, despi her lack of personal attractiveness, but she had never care to leave Ernest.

For about five years the two had travelled about, settlin in one place after another, but finding no home to the minds. Their own childhood's home, though much belove had been quitted, and after long hesitation sold, on accou of Rachel's health. Though stout she was not strong, an as ailments increased upon her, the change from a damp an relaxing climate was found necessary. The purchase Claverton Manor, seven or eight months since, had been somewhat hasty act. But neither brother nor sister sa cause as yet to repent the step. Rachel found herself un usually well, and both society and occupation lay ready i plenty to their hand.

'Mr. Fielding wishes me to start a class among the Claver ton young men,' Ernest remarked, breaking silence.

'A Bible-class?'

'Yes, once a week, in the evening. I told him I wa willing.'

'Don't try to do too much,' she said, with the motherly soli citude she was accustomed to exercise over him. 'You are no so strong as to be able to undertake everything you are asked.

'I am thinking whether to hold it here,' said Ernest, pass ing over the warning.

'In this room?'

'Well, no, that would disturb you.'

'I should not disturb you. Besides, I could sit elsewhere. This is your room of course.'

'Thank you; we will consider it. Mr. Fielding also thinks of giving a tea to his Sunday-school teachers, the

whole party of them. I heard him say that he was rather in difficulties as to room, now their numbers have so much increased, so I offered him the use of our house and garden.'

Rachel never objected to anything that her brother wished in the way of doing good or helping others to do good. She simply asked, 'When?'

'In two or three weeks, I believe. The date is not fixed.'

'Well, you must let me know all that you want done.'

'Mr. Fielding's plan was to invite friends from the neighbourhood to help in amusing them. He—he mentioned Mrs. and Miss Bertram particularly.'

A slight change passed over Rachel's face. She did not look displeased, but a touch of hardness crept into the lines about her mouth.

'Very unlikely that either will come. Sunday-school teas are not in Mrs. Bertram's line.'

'I am not sure that they will, still I should like to ask them. Of course all association with the Manor must be painful to them, but the oftener they are here the less they will feel it. Mrs. Bertram has been quite cordial in her manner of late. I wish, Rachel, you would try to become more intimate with Miss Bertram.'

Ernest flushed slightly as he spoke, and took a turn across the room.

'I suspect Miss Bertram would rather be excused.'

'But you like her?'

'She is handsome,' said Rachel. 'I do not admire that haughty manner.'

'Miss Bertram haughty! O no, you do not understand her. You could not think that of her—if—— And she could not have meant it.'

'I am not thinking of her manner to myself, but to you.'

'It is not haughtiness. I do not believe she can help that manner. And you know what Mr. Fielding thinks of her.'

'Mr. Fielding is not infallible. You men are so easily taken in.'

Ernest bit his lip, and indulged in another turn. At the middle window he stood still, seeming to watch something curiously.

'Who is that?'

'What?'

'Someone in our garden. He evidently feels very much at home.'

Rachel came to her brother's side. A man was slowly crossing the lawn, picking his steps carefully as if to avoid crushing the daisy-blossoms on his way, having his hat in his hand, and his head bent thoughtfully forward. Once or twice a pair of mild eyes were lifted to take a dreamy survey of the far blue hills. He paused before a triangular bed, gazed fixedly at the flowers, and gently touched one or two drooping fuchsia-blossoms. Then, as if instinctively, he turned his steps towards the house, and with downcast eyes approached the open library-window.

'The man must be out of his mind,' said Rachel.

'A singular individual. He doesn't strike me as being insane, but that blaze on his bare head is enough to give him sunstroke. I am going to speak to him.'

Ernest Wentworth had not many steps to go. Finding himself likely to be passed unnoticed, he said pleasantly:

'Are you looking for somebody? Will you come into the shade?'

'How do you do?' the stranger said earnestly, putting out a hand which Ernest did not hesitate to take. He was greatly amused. But the next moment their eyes met, and the waking start and sorrowful look of the other were no matter for amusement. A swift glance round, and a perplexed gaze at Mr. Wentworth, were followed by a sigh.

'I beg your pardon—I am strangely absent. I have no business here. For the moment I had forgotten—entirely forgotten.'

'Were you acquainted with Mr. Rivers?'

Montgomery could scarcely speak at the moment. He

had not realised before the nature of the changes which had taken place. He was thinking of Muriel and Arthur Bertram, not of himself. The summer loveliness of this spot brought home to him with sharp distinctness the fact that Muriel lived here no longer.

'Poor children!' he murmured. 'Sad—sad for them. But Muriel's brave spirit——'

Ernest's hand came on his arm.

'I cannot let you go on,' he said; 'I am a stranger, and you forget that I am here. You are acquainted with Miss Bertram?'

'I was her brother's tutor. I had something to do with the training of her mind,' said Maxwell meekly.

'I think you must have felt that an honour.'

'I did. It was. There are few like her.'

'And you came here to have a look at the old place,' said Ernest kindly.

'It was a mistake—it was a mistake. I am very apt to forget. I booked for Bushby, but I was so accustomed of old to get out at the nearer station that I did so without thought.'

'Ludham! Have you walked three miles in this sun?' There were two stations within reach of Claverton: Ludham, distant three miles in one direction, and Bushby, distant four miles in another direction.

'I could not resist it. I got out at Ludham with my portmanteau, and the train went on before I remembered my mistake. I always take my portmanteau with me in the carriage. It is not large, still I could not have carried it from Ludham to Bushby—nearly six miles. No other train touches at both Ludham and Bushby till late this evening. So I thought I would pass the hours by taking a stroll to Claverton; and somehow when I came here it looked so like old days, I entirely forgot how things were changed——'

'I am delighted that you did forget. Come indoors and rest,' said Ernest, with his bright and boyish yet courteous

manner. 'A cup of tea will do you good. This sun must have given you a headache. Will you allow me to ask your name?'

'Montgomery Maxwell' had a familiar sound to Ernest's ears. He was pretty well up in Claverton stories about his predecessor and that predecessor's belongings in the past. Leaving Maxwell standing submissively on the grass, he sped to the open window, and quickly explained the state of affairs to his sister. Montgomery was once more deep in reverie when he returned, and Ernest stood waiting, loth to disturb his thoughts.

'Well,' he said at length, as if waking up. 'Well—it is well. God knows best.'

'The ups and downs of this life are trying—where they touch closely,' said Ernest.

'Too trying. They ought not to touch so closely. Why is not here or there the same to us? Home is neither here nor there. One strip of wilderness sand ought to be as good as another to pitch one's tent upon.'

'I am no metaphysician or cosmopolitan either,' said Ernest, smiling. 'Home is home to me. And our Lord loved Jerusalem.'

'He did—He did. That was the very model of self-renouncing love. Don't think I despise this earth; it is our inheritance. And I too may love my country, and may love any one spot in that country. Yes—even a strip of sand would grow dear, after many nights of sleeping upon it. But we ought to hold such things with a light grasp—not cling to them.'

'Some have felt the danger of wealth so great that they have condemned the wealth itself as sinful,' said Ernest. 'I do not feel that myself. I look upon wealth as a sacred trust to be used in the service of the Master.'

'It may be so—should be so. When it is swept away, then comes the testing-time.'

'One may not speak beforehand of how one could meet

such a test,' said Ernest moderately. 'But, Mr. Maxwell, if the test comes, will not the grace come also to bear one through?'

'If one looks for it—yes, surely. "Let him take hold of My strength." Yes, that will not fail. But we do fail often to take hold.'

'Then we are generally brought to our senses by a complete break-down, from which there is no remedy but in coming back to the Master's feet.'

'You have learnt to serve Him early,' said Maxwell, looking at Mr. Wentworth with interest.

Ernest smiled. 'What do you suppose to be my age?'

'It is difficult to guess. Perhaps—four-and-twenty, or even more.'

'I am thirty-three.'

'Indeed! The same age as——'

Maxwell did not conclude. Ernest had a conjecture as to the unspoken thought.

'Come indoors,' he said kindly. 'You are tired and must need rest. This is my sister—Mr. Maxwell, Rachel. You will remember his name. Ah, here is tea awaiting us. Sit down, Mr. Maxwell—there is no hurry. We will drive you to the station by-and-by.'

'Thank you—thank you,' Montgomery murmured once or twice, and then finding himself in the cool library he added, 'This is pleasant. Yes, all so familiar. But it is changed too. Thank you, no milk or sugar,' in answer to Rachel's inquiries. 'This is very resting. But I could not trouble you, indeed—I can easily walk to the station.'

'It will be no trouble,' Rachel said. 'Are you going to sleep at Mrs. Bertram's?'

'I—I have not arranged anything,' said Montgomery. 'No, certainly not at Mrs. Bertram's. I have only just returned from abroad, and I did not tell them I was coming. John Rivers', perhaps, or the inn——'

'Your wisest course is very plain, said Ernest. 'That

train takes you in late, and you might put your friends to inconvenience if they do not expect you. You shall sleep here to-night, and we will drive you to Bushby in the morning.'

'Thank you—thank you—I thank you,' faltered Maxwell, extremely reluctant, yet dreading to appear ungrateful.

'But you would rather go on to-night?'

'I have not seen them all for eight years. I am afraid I am very impatient,' said Montgomery deprecatingly.

'We must not put your patience to a longer test than eight years of waiting,' said Ernest, and he left the room for a few minutes. Coming back, his remark was, 'The vicar of Bushby is in very delicate health.'

'Ah, poor fellow—poor John—he never was robust.'

'He has been ordered abroad, as I dare say you know. I believe nothing is yet settled. He will be a great loss to Bushby: "A man in whom the Spirit of God is."'

Montgomery set down his cup thoughtfully.

'It seems strange to us lookers-on—the interruption to such a career of usefulness. But God's ways are not as our ways. He knows best. He may have work for John to do elsewhere; or He may have work to be done in Bushby which John can't do; or John's own character may need the trial. I think we are apt to make too much of these things, these comings and goings, being wanted here or being useful there, gaining this or losing that. God has instruments enough ready to His hand. After all, there is "one thing" to be desired of the Lord, and lesser matters and minor changes should not stir us too deeply.'

Ernest's face smiled full response. Wealth and ease had not sullied the brightness of his Christian life, or dimmed the fervour of his faith and love.

'You remind me of a favourite verse of mine,' he said:

'"Sick or healthful, slave or free,
Wealthy, or despised and poor,
What is that to him or thee
So his love to Christ endure?

When the shore is won at last,
Who will count the billows past?" '

'Beautiful—beautiful,' said Montgomery. 'John has had many billows, but never one too strong.'

'And I have had few. Have I any right to speak of endurance as a duty?'

'They will come in time. Don't be afraid,' said Montgomery, looking kindly at the young man. 'Your life won't be too easy. Or, if it seems so, I have my doubts whether success and ease and smoothness are not some of the strongest billows which a soul ever has to face on the way heavenward. It is harder sometimes to hold by the things of another world when this world is light than when it is dark.'

'I believe *that*,' said Ernest. 'My earthly things may have to be taken from me some day.'

'If they are, give them up willingly, Mr. Wentworth.'

'It doesn't look impossible now. I think I could yield without a murmur. Yet how foolish to be confident before the trial comes. Others have found it so hard. They say poor old Mr. Rivers, past eighty as he was, and just done with this world, was almost heart-broken at his losses. But I beg your pardon; I forgot that you were his friend.'

'He had not known his Master long,' said Montgomery quietly. 'Spiritual growth is a work of time, quicker or slower of course with different people. He was a young Christian, Mr. Wentworth, though a very old man, and the earth-shackles must have been hard to break.'

They had a long hour's talk, touching upon many things which each most loved. The deep vein of spirituality, running through the life of either, showed itself in different ways, but met and mingled when they came together, yielding a sense of pure and high enjoyment. Mutual trust and mutual liking grew rapidly. Other subjects for conversation came in, and the hour grew into two hours. A man-servant at length entered, and spoke a few low words to his master.

'It is not fair to delay you longer,' said Ernest. 'The

carriage is ready, Mr. Maxwell, whenever you wish t
use of it. But I hope we shall see more of you wh
are in Bushby.'

'Thank you, it is most kind! I ought to be going, i
It is getting late.'

At the front door stood the brougham, with the
champing their bits impatiently. Maxwell's well-wor
manteau lay upon the footboard, not adding perhaps
comfort of the dignified coachman, or of his liverie
panion, who now stood below, holding open the door

'My portmanteau!' said Montgomery, amazed.

'It seemed needless trouble for you to drive thre
to a station, when four would take you to your jo
end,' said Ernest. 'There is a lad with a brisk littl
and chaise who was very willing to get your luggage, s
you can be set down at the Vicarage. Is there nothi
I can do for you?'

'No,' said Montgomery, grasping his hand. 'Than
It only reminds me of certain words—"a stranger a
took me in."'

And Ernest watched him drive away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE VICARAGE HOUSE.

ught not to be out so late as this. It is very wrong,' ıstance Rivers.

ras the vicar's only daughter, a sweet-faced girl of xteen, childish still in dress and manner, with fair ng down her back. The Vicarage stood in a quiet . the outskirts of Bushby, with country fields close . Constance leant on the garden-gate, watching y. A plump bright little woman, with undimmed s and happy lips, had just come up behind her.

ding out for papa, Connie?'

I don't see him, mamma. He ought to be coming oad by this time.'

ught not to have gone out at all to-day. This heat is .usting for him. A message has come from Nancy ıegging to see either him or me in great haste. I at once, of course. Don't say much about it to ıer, but give him his tea directly he comes in.'

e and Johnnie and Artie are away at cricket. I lieve they will be back till late.'

—that does not matter. Frankie is in the back- but call him in soon. These autumn evenings turn ıen the sun is down, and the damp will fall early. I ır father were back.'

ance wished it too. She would have gone in search had she known where to find him. Rosamond astened away in her own blithe style, and Constance

waited on patiently—with a patience somewhat tried, till a man appeared round the nearest bend in the road, toiling slowly up the slight ascent.

Constance rushed out, hatless, to meet him. She said nothing, but offered her arm, and John Rivers, with a wordless smile, accepted the slight support. He was labouring for breath, and drops of exhaustion stood upon his brow. The garden-gate reached, he leaned upon it, faint and panting! Constance watched him with sorrowful eyes, while he lingered to gather strength for the crossing of the lawn. Before he stirred again, a carriage with two horses dashed up the hill, and stopped before the Vicarage. A gentleman made his way hastily to the ground, and then with a look of concern, exclaimed,

'John! No, not John! Not possible.'

'Maxwell—surely!' said John.

'Thank you, thank you—nothing more. I am very much obliged,' said Maxwell hurriedly, to the coachman. 'My box? O, it can stand anywhere—here on the path—it does not matter—till I go to the inn——'

'Or rather, till you sleep here,' said John, laying his wasted hands on Maxwell's shoulder, partly in friendship, partly for support. 'Bring it in, please.'

'No, no, I shall be in your way. I did not think of that. My poor fellow, I never dreamt that you were so ill,' said Montgomery in distress.

The protest was disregarded. Constance obeyed her father's glance, and took the matter of the portmanteau into her own hands, while the two gentlemen went slowly up the path. Having seen it carried in, she gave directions as to the spare room, and then rushed to make the cup of tea which she knew was needed. Entering the drawing-room, she found her father suffering from one of his most violent paroxysms of coughing, while Maxwell looked on with a helpless air of concern. The excitement of his sudden appearance had acted as Constance had feared it would act.

The tea was useless, for he could not touch it, and his struggles for breath were painful to see. Twice the fit nearly passed off, and an attempt to speak brought it back with renewed intensity. The third time he was past speaking. A small glass of restorative, kept at hand for such emergencies, was fetched by Constance, and after taking it he lay with closed eyes, the flush on his face giving place to a ghastly pallor.

'Is he often like this?' asked Maxwell under his breath.

'Not often so bad. He often has coughing.'

'I ought not to have come here. He is unfit for visitors.'

John's lips moved.

'It won't hurt by-and-by,' said Constance hastily,—'if he could have an hour quite quiet. Would you mind, please, just going into the dining-room? I will come as soon as I can. It is only across the passage. I am afraid papa will talk if you are here, and he ought not to speak.'

John's eyes opened, with a little smile at them both.

'You are quite right—quite prudent,' said Maxwell. 'I now the way. Don't come. I will wait any length of time.'

He had a good half-hour for the indulging of old memories, nd then Connie appeared.

'The room is in a dreadful mess, I am afraid,' she said ologetically, looking round. 'But the boys learn their ssons and play here, and they don't put things away.'

'Do you remember me, Connie?' asked Maxwell. 'My ar, I do not know whether I ought to call you Miss Rivers, t I can't. Your father is "John" to me.'

'I never liked to be called "Miss Rivers,"' said Constance. es, I think I remember you. Didn't you come to the use a great many years ago, when papa had low fever, and or grandpapa was taken with his first paralytic stroke? yes, and you nearly let out to papa that grandpapa was the house, when nobody wanted him to know it. I member all that. You are the Mr. Maxwell that dear uriel thinks so much about.'

Child-like, Constance did not realize the import of her own words.

Maxwell flushed somewhat, and asked, 'How do you know?' Then he felt as if the question were hardly justifiable, and would have withdrawn it, but could not. His 'Never mind, I have no right to ask,' was lost upon Constance.

'Why, she often talks about you to me, Mr. Maxwell. That is how I feel as if I knew you so well, because really I don't seem to remember seeing you very clearly. Muriel never forgets anybody, you know. She often tells me about the time when you used to teach her so much, and be such a good friend to her. I can recollect those years, when poor grandpapa wouldn't let her ever come to our house, and she says your kindness was the greatest comfort she had then. She often calls you "that good Mr. Maxwell." And one day lately she seemed down-hearted and sad—I don't know why, only she does sometimes—and she talked about parting with people for years being so melancholy. She was thinking partly about papa and us having to leave England so soon, I suppose. I said to her, "You haven't often parted from your friends for very long, Murie, have you?" and she said, "O, so often!" And then she spoke of her great friend, aunt Sibyl, who went out to India a few years ago, and Muriel never thought she would die in one year of cholera. I had forgotten that, for I know Muriel always feels so much about her. And I said, "There is your good Mr. Maxwell, who has gone abroad;" and she said, "That may be a parting too for life. I am not likely ever to see him again, and I dare say he has left off thinking about us all by this time."'

'Muriel ought not to have said that,' observed Maxwell.

'Perhaps she did not really mean it,' said Constance. 'People often say things they don't mean. At all events Muriel has never forgotten you—nor cousin Arthur nor papa. Muriel will be so pleased to see you. She and aunt Mary

it away yesterday morning for a visit to Sir John Helps; they won't stay more than a week. I think I shan't tell riel when I write that you are here, because it would spoil surprise to her.'

Don't, pray, say anything,' begged Maxwell earnestly.

No, and I will ask mamma not either. I wish you were ig to live in Claverton again as you used to do. Poor rie will be so lonely when we are gone. I can't bear to k about it for her. The boys will have to go to a board- school, and perhaps a strange clergyman will live here, Murie will mind that so much. Mamma can't bear to e Frankie behind, because he is delicate, and has always i the pet, but we are afraid it will have to be.'

And you, Connie?'

I am to go—of course. At least if Australia is settled I must certainly. It isn't so certain, if papa goes to the . But Dr. Peters wants papa to have me with him. I verything for him when mamma is busy. Perhaps it not be either Australia or Egypt, but only Cannes, after Papa thinks that would be more easily managed, and Peters seems giving way a little. The other two plans so difficult to arrange, because of the expense. Papa is ing till he can see his way, and we are asking about ols for the boys. It is puzzling, because boys' schools dreadfully expensive now. A hundred a year for a boy, counting extras, seems quite common, and hardly any- g suitable can be found under seventy or eighty, and extras, and books, and clothes, do mount up so. des, Frankie is not fit for a big boarding-school. And there will be all our expenses in travelling, and a clergy- to take papa's place here, or else a second curate. It es to a great deal.'

t does indeed,' murmured Montgomery.

onstance began to think she had done her duty by her or, in so far entertaining him. Having vainly pressed a of tea upon him, she apologised prettily for enforced

absence, recommended him to the book-case, and disappeare Maxwell took a book as directed, reading it at first rath as a duty to calm his mind, but slowly becoming abstracte from the present. He had forgotten his whereabouts, wh a touch roused him.

'Connie has banished you long enough,' said John, takin refuge in the deep arm-chair, covered with brown Americai cloth which had long since lost its shine. Montgomery had not noticed his approach. 'This is a cold welcome to you. Don't judge of my feelings by it.'

'My dear fellow, I only feel ashamed and vexed—I only wish I had not come.'

'That is a wish in which I can't join. It is a great pleasure. The truth is, you brought up old recollections rather too strongly.'

John's voice faltered, and his thin fingers, grasping the arm of the chair, trembled visibly.

'I am easily upset just now—not much strength left. You know that my dear grandfather was taken from us eight months ago.'

'Mrs. Irwin told me a good deal. It must have been a painful time to you all.'

'I don't think I have ever rallied from the pressure of it. I was with him to the last.'

'John, was it a peaceful death?'

'Entire peace; not triumph. At the close he was unconscious, but a few hours before he spoke clearly. Among the last words I could distinguish were, "Sin! sin!—a miserable sinner!—but 'where sin abounded grace did much more abound!'" And when I said, "The word of Jesus is, 'Let not your heart be troubled,'" he looked up with a smile and said, "O His Infinite love, John!"'

'And those were his last words?'

John could not answer at first. His face was hidden in his hands, and when at length he broke silence it was with difficulty and unsteadiness.

'I am not able to talk much about that time yet. Rose forbids the subject.'

'Don't—you had better not. Tell me about your going abroad. Where is it to be?'

'Somewhere. I don't know where.'

'It is an anxious matter for you.'

'I can't afford to be anxious. I have no strength to spare in worry. It will all come clear in time.

'And you think—the doctors think—it will set you up?'

'I think—and they think—that it is my last hope, humanly speaking, of anything like recovery.'

'People do recover wonderfully from consumption in these days,' said Montgomery, trying to speak cheerfully. 'I have known some marvellous restorations to health.'

'Well—the nature of my illness is to be sanguine,' said John slowly. 'I hardly trust my own feelings. My sober judgment tells me rather not to hope. The downward progress has been so steady. Australia might do more for me than anything—but I do not see how it is to be managed.'

'Connie spoke of Cannes.'

'That seems more within reach. I could return in the summer. I don't see my way to the Australian plan. It involves so much. And I might never come back.'

'Ought you to dwell upon such possibilities? They may hinder your recovery.'

'That from *you*,' said John, smiling.

'I only mean that depression is bad for an invalid.'

'I am not a depressed invalid.' And presently he said, '"If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." What does that "house" strictly mean? The glorified body after resurrection? But that is entirely future. Here the sense would rather seem present, immediately after death—I don't speak positively. One of the "many mansions"? But this "house" is in contradistinction to the "body of sin"—the "tabernacle" which St. Paul

looked to put off shortly. May one think of it in connection with the "spiritual body" spoken of by St. Paul in the grand resurrection-chapter to the Corinthians? How little we know what marvels of glory and beauty await us in the world to come.'

'"Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon,"' said Maxwell.

John's face changed a little.

'If I could take them all with me! How can I "earnestly desire" that they should be left to struggle through life alone? I am not quite so selfish. For myself, "willing rather." For my dear ones, "the will of the Lord be done."'

'No need to go farther, John; the Master Himself took stand there,' said Maxwell.

With the best intentions and a most kind heart, Montgomery Maxwell was, as will have already appeared, an extremely absent man. The captive always of one leading idea, side notions and background duties were apt to slip out of existence. In the landscape of his mind he knew no blue distances, green trees, or picturesque cottages, lending to the effect of the prominent figure or group. The picture consisted of sharply-defined foreground, bounded by grey fog. Every figure that retired from the foreground was immediately lost in mist.

So fared Mrs. James Bertram and her young daughter. When he left them, albeit much interested, with feelings stirred, and sense of duty alive on their behalf, the figure of Muriel rose before his mind's eye, and the London Bertrams faded away. He had to hasten home, to look out the trains, to prepare for his journey. Moreover, being tired, he slept soundly. One way and another, it came to pass that the thought of the promised doctor's visit occurred to him no more, until he was in the act of going to bed, on the first evening after his arrival at Bushby Vicarage.

One day more or less might make little difference to the invalid; still Montgomery blamed himself extremely. He

wrote a letter forthwith to his medical friend, giving the address, mentioning his own strong interest in the case, begging him to call without delay, and offering to undertake all expenses. The letter went off by the early morning's post, and in due time arrived at its destination. But the doctor was absent, having started on a brief walking tour, and the doctor's wife, having opened the letter, decided at first sight of the signature that it was 'merely one of that odd Mr. Maxwell's scientific essays by post.' The lady, not being scientific, and wishing to spare her husband, put it aside till his return. So it came to pass that Pauline and her mother waited in vain for the expected visit.

'It is plain enough the gentleman doesn't mean to have anything more to do with us,' Mrs. James Bertram said on the fourth day. 'He might as well not have promised. But I thought it odd that he didn't give us his name. He doesn't know he has let slip Mrs. Bertram's secret; and he thinks he won't come in the way of being asked it again.'

'Mother, he wouldn't be likely to be back so soon,' said Pauline.

'You don't know. I don't see why not. But at any rate the doctor would come if he was asked. I don't see anything to hinder that. No, no, I know better. He daren't show himself again for fear I should find out where Mrs. Bertram lives.'

'We can't go to Bushby. We have not money for the journey,' said Pauline.

'That's all you know! Do you think I haven't kept an eye to the journey all the while? Get me my lock-box, Pauline.'

Pauline obeyed. It was a rough little brown box, with a stout key. Mrs. Bertram's shrunken yellow hands opened it, and took out a small packet.

'That is father's hair,' said Pauline. 'You told me never to touch it. May I look now?'

'It is like yours,' said Mrs. Bertram, letting drop the thick

lock, black, shiny, and uncurled. From its centre she took something—a green translucent stone.

'Mother!' said Pauline, trembling.

'It is worth twenty pounds, if it is worth ten,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'Mother!' said Pauline passionately. She had been educated at an English school; not a first-rate one, yet she had there gained a certain sharply-defined English sense of honour and honesty. Also she had a straightforward nature, a character which in its very pride scorned duplicity.

'You needn't look angry, Pauline.'

'You had that, mother, and you let the gentleman give you what he did—and you told him we had nothing!'

'I told him we hadn't another sixpence. Wasn't it true? Don't you fuss, Pauline. I know what I am about very well—better than you do. I set this apart ever so long ago for the journey, and I promised myself I wouldn't use it for anything else—no, not if we were starving. I will get to Mrs. Bertram's. I mean to do that before I die, if I never go anywhere else. I tell you it is all for you, Pauline. I am not going to die, if I can help it, leaving you without a home in all the world. Mrs. Bertram must do something for you. This is our very last, and we shan't get over ten pounds for it, I suppose. Lucky if we have so much. Old Moses will beat you down to five if you let him, so mind you stand firm. He'll say it is a sham, and you may tell him that's a lie. It's as pretty an emerald as ever he handled with his dirty fingers. It's worth twenty pounds at the least, and it ought to take us to Bushby, and keep us there till things are arranged. Mrs. Bertram will do something—no fear about that, if it's only to get rid of us. We must pay our rent here too, before we leave; so you see you needn't fret, for we are going to be honest. I have made up my mind. We'll go to Bushby to-morrow. I am glad the doctor has not come. He might say I wasn't fit to travel, and go I will—if it kills me! I'm just set upon it. We'll go to-morrow. I don't

believe I should get off, if we waited much longer. Mind, you've got to see to everything. You have, Pauline. Do you hear?'

She had had no answer through her long and excited speech. The girl's face had whitened and settled into a stony look of displeasure and pain. The last question, twice repeated, drew from her a reluctant 'Yes.'

'And you are to manage everything for me. It's as much as ever I can do to stand. I tried last night, and I didn't know how to bear myself, the pain was so dreadful. I think I shall die of it if it gets much worse. I wish that gentleman had not come and talked as he did. He hadn't any business. The things he said bother me at night. Pauline, you've got to take this.'

'If only we needn't go to Bushby, mother. I hate it—ıate it. I can't tell how I hate it.'

'Ah, you're like your father. But there's no need to ınind. You don't know anything about it at all, nor about hem. Mind, you are a lady by birth, and you've got to hold ɔ it. *I* wasn't, may be, but you are, for your father was a entleman. Nobody could look upon him, and say he rasn't. He had a touch of native blood in him, but for all hat he wasn't a native gentleman, he was an English gentle-nan. He was brought up in an English home, and an Eng-sh school. And you are an English lady, Pauline, and this ın't the manner of life for you,' the woman added, with one f her occasional bursts of tenderness.

The slender head went up. 'I think I *am* a lady,' said 'auline. 'I feel it in me, mother. But that is why I *hate*) take anybody in, or to be beholden to anybody. I would ıther eat dry bread all my life, than go and beg of this aunt. ınd if she is proud, I am just as proud. I can't and I won't sk charity of her. It has been hard enough going to Mrs. rwin, with that scornful footman driving me from the door. t made me miserable. O mother, mother, I can't go on ke this!' and Pauline burst into bitter tears.

Mrs. Bertram waited till the sobs stilled, and even t
soothe her child by caresses, but she changed not one
her determination. An hour later a girlish figure, w
round, with face half hidden, crept through the dus
shabby little jeweller's in a neighbouring street. Paul
no match for the astute old Jew behind the counter.
and her mother had to be content with a sum falling v
short of the hoped-for ten pounds.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A MEETING.

'It is to be hoped that John will have come to some manner of decision by this time,' indolently remarked Mrs. Bertram, having two hours before reached home with Muriel, after a week's absence from Bushby. She was leaning back in an easy-chair, sipping a cup of afternoon tea with her usual studied grace. 'The air feels quite chilly to-day. If he does not leave soon, he will not get away at all.'

Muriel stood by the table in walking attire, and Mrs. Bertram lifted her eyes with an air of some surprise. 'What can you possibly be going out for already?'

'I thought you could spare me for an hour, mamma. I want to see how John is.'

'Probably the same as usual. He will be sure to look in presently, so you may as well spare yourself the fatigue.'

'It is no fatigue; I would rather go,' said Muriel, who had a restless fit upon her, and wanted to see some other face besides the fair and unsatisfying one which was her perpetual companion. 'Can I do anything for you in Bushby?'

'You can get me some black ribbon to match the trimming of my tarletan dress. Three yards, exactly the same width. Take a piece for a pattern.'

This caused an excursion upstairs on the part of Muriel, followed by two more, before her mother's wants were satisfied. She went and came patiently, as desired, but outside the front door she stood still, with firmly-set lips.

'I must take a brisk turn. This will never do. Why is it so hard to come home? I ought to be broken in by this time,—cured of chafing. Sometimes I think it grows less easy instead of more easy to bear up. People complain of overwork and busy lives and no leisure. That would be delight to me. It is this narrow colourless existence which frets and wears me. And yet it ought not; John would say it ought not, and so would Mr. Maxwell. Or rather they would say that whether or no I find it wearing, I ought not to be fretted. For it is God's will. Years ago I remember thinking my spirit of discontent quite beaten down. I thought I could be glad whatever came, just because it would be my Father's will. But the old spirit has sprung up like a giant of late,—a sort of resuscitation. I think one is liable to that. I am sure one has to learn such lessons, not once and for all, but over and over again through life.'

Muriel left the garden, and went some little way down the road. Suddenly she stopped, her thoughts diverted in a new direction.

'If you please, could you tell me——' a voice said.

Muriel had a curious sense that the face upon which she was looking, though entirely that of a stranger, was not absolutely unfamiliar. The slim girl, brown-skinned, lustrous-eyed, and shabby-genteel in dress, who had paused to address her, brought back an odd recollection of the face she was accustomed to see day by day reflected on her dressing-table at home, while brushing her hair. She could have smiled at the notion. Thought is rapid; and while these ideas flashed through her mind, the simple sentence was being said,—

'If you please, could you tell me which is Mrs. Bertram's house? They say it is in this road.'

'Do you wish to speak to Mrs. Bertram?' asked Muriel kindly. She had with those who were troubled or poor no afraid a 'gracious' manner, courteous and gentle, the fru

of combined lessons and example from both Mr. Maxwell and her mother. Mrs. Bertram's good manners were the result of high breeding,—Mr. Maxwell's of humility, and, when shyness laid not her iron hand on him, of self-forgetfulness. Muriel's were a cross between the two. No touch of haughtiness came in here.

'Thank you—just to know where she lives.'

'A little way up this road. Do you see those tall trees standing in a garden? That is the house. But if you have business with Mrs. Bertram, perhaps you had better mention it to me instead. She is not strong, and I generally take such things off her hands.'

The girl looked perplexed; not perplexed only, but pained and distressed. Muriel added kindly, 'I am her daughter, Miss Bertram,' and then a deep blush swept over the other's face. Muriel read humiliation in it.

'Is there anything I can do for you?' she said. 'Are you in trouble? Perhaps I can help you.'

The girl seemed half-choked. 'Thank you—no; mother —mother said—I must speak to Mrs. Bertram——'

'Mrs. Bertram has just returned from a long journey and is tired. I would rather she should not be troubled to-day. You don't think I should do as well?'

'I'll wait—another day,' was the smothered reply.

'Will you tell me your name, that I may mention it to her?'

A fresh wave of burning colour passed over the downcast face, going as quickly as it came. Silence was the only response.

'I think you are not English,' said Muriel quietly.

'Not—quite.'

'Have you been living long in Bushby? I never saw your face about here before.'

'No,—two days.'

'And you have come to see friends?'

'O no!' She looked up suddenly, with a touchingly

sorrowful expression, a child-like helpless appeal, which went straight to Muriel's heart. 'Mother has no friends.'

There are people in the world who cannot believe in the magnetic attraction sometimes exercised and felt at first sight between two intensely sympathetic natures. Love and trust must with them be of necessity reached through due successive stages of distant bows, polite hand-shakes, cool acquaintance, increasing appreciation, and gradual warmth. That two people, whether of the same sex or of different sexes, should at very first sight plunge into genuine mutual confidence and affection,—ay, confidence and affection which shall stand the wear and tear of years, only growing stronger thereby,—is, to such excellent folks, a mere delusion of romantic imaginations. And yet it does happen in real life; and the spurious imitations of it, in quickly-made and quickly-dropped friendships, often seen, do not touch the fact of the reality. But the two natures concerned, whatever else be their characteristics, must of necessity be sympathetic—I do not say merely sympathising, for that is a different matter,—but sympathetic.

By that single look Muriel's heart was touched and won. Had she and Pauline never met again, nor exchanged another word, she would never have forgotten it. Conventionality went to the winds, despite all Mrs. Bertram's years of anxious training and repression. She laid her gloved hand gently on the other's arm, and with her whole soul shining in pity through her eyes, said tenderly, 'Poor child! what is it?'

For months Pauline Bertram had fought her way through the cold world, with few to speak a kind word to her. She broke down at this, and burst into weeping,—such bitter heart-broken weeping as Muriel, with all her experience of sorrow, had never yet seen in one so young. Yet it did not last long, for Pauline had learnt self-restraint.

'You will tell me now how I can help you,' Muriel said winningly at length. They were standing under an old

beech-tree, and not a passer-by had gone up or down the road since the two had begun to speak.

'I must ask mother. I'll ask mother,' was all that Pauline dared say.

'Is she so anxious for you to see my mother? Come, then, and speak to her now, if the matter is important.'

Pauline shrank. 'O no, I would rather not; I would rather speak to you. I am so afraid of Mrs. Bertram. Please don't tell Mrs. Bertram or anybody about me. I'll ask mother if I may come to you. And *you* will be kind, I am sure; but you will not be glad,' she added mournfully.

'And you would rather not give me your mother's name and address? Well, never mind. Why does she not come herself?'

'She is ill—very very ill. The journey has made her so bad, I dare not cross her in anything. I thought she was dying last night,' and the young face whitened at the recollection. 'I never saw any one die, and I was so afraid.'

'Had you the doctor?'

'O no. We don't know anybody here at all.'

'Will you let me go and see her?'

'I'll ask mother.'

The girl looked once more earnestly in her face, and then, as under sudden impulse, she lifted Muriel's hand to her lips —'I am Pauline,' she said. 'Pauline is my name. I must not say more. But please call me Pauline,—and *please* don't say one word about me to anybody till I come to your house. I wish—O I wish——'

She broke off, and hurried swiftly away. Muriel stood still, much moved. 'Strange!' she said, as Mr. Maxwell had said before her. 'A half-caste, I should think. What can have brought her here? We don't often see half-castes in this part of the world. What can she want with mamma? Is it possible that she has any connection with our little family history? But what is the use of conjuring up romances?

I am afraid mamma will not be particularly pleased to see her. She has such an aversion to half-castes. I have not been very prudent, perhaps ; but how could I act otherwise? Poor troubled child! it made my heart ache to see that lonely sad look of hers. I know what loneliness is. A lovely face, too,—I suppose that was partly what won me. Well, I have been murmuring over the uselessnesss of my life. What if here is to be a bit of active work, cut out ready to my hand? Will mamma consent to my doing what I wish? If not, how far am I bound to yield? O, I am foolish. No need to trouble myself beforehand. The guidance will come with the difficulty.'

She went on to the Vicarage, and found John out, Rose out, Connie out, the boys out. Muriel walked in at the front door without ringing, after her wont, and hunted, but hunted in vain, through the house for any specimen of the Rivers family. Her first hasty glance had been into the study, and that one glance revealed John's chair to be empty; so she had sought no farther. Coming downstairs she thought, 'I hardly gave a fair look there,' and opening the door she gave another.

But the study was not empty. Before the bookcase stood a figure with bent head, the half-bald summit of which was caught by a sunbeam creeping through a broken slip in the lowered venetian. Muriel stood stock-still.

'The spleenwort—yes, of course, the *Asplenium adiantum nigrum*, as I told John. Somehow he never did take much to botany, poor fellow. What could make him fancy it the other species? Well, well, well—always best to verify, always best to verify, however sure one may be. Poor John.'

Maxwell shut the volume in his hands, put it back on the shelf, pulled out another, and then, as if involuntarily, turned.

'Why, Muriel!' he said.

It was the most natural of meetings on his part. At the moment he forgot all about wishes, hopes, intentions. He

me straight towards her, took both her hands, and looked o her face with a mingling of anxiety and affectionate light.

Muriel was indignant with herself. She *could* not meet n as he met her. She dared not lift her eyes to his face, l voice for welcome she had none. 'Why, Muriel, my r Muriel,' he said gently, 'you are altered. They did : tell me how you were altered. You have grown thin, te thin and worn.'

'It does not matter—I mean—' said Muriel, hesitating l trembling like a leaf.

'You are not so strong as you used to be,' he said. 'I 'e startled you.'

'Yes, rather.'

It was as much as she could do to restrain herself. She ked to the window, and stood looking out for a full iute, while Montgomery gravely watched but did not ow her. When she returned, her head was thrown back ı something of her mother's air.

'I did not know I had grown so silly,' she said, taking a t. 'But you seem so bound up with old days.'

'Is that all?' he asked. 'You are not glad to see me for own sake?'

'O how can you ask?'

'The old tutor will always be a friend, will he?'

'I never knew half I owed to you till you were gone,' she . 'But people can't write thanks—at least I can't.'

'I never want thanks from you. Muriel, did you think I forgotten you?'

'No—O no,' she answered.

'No, I did not forget—I never forgot—I could not forget. I told you when I went away that it was best and right, so it was—so it was. I could not have been trusted near much longer, and I have not dared to trust myself since, er to come or to write. I would not now, only things are rent. *My cousin, John* Holmes, has died intestate, and

his little property has come to me. It isn't wealth, but still I have a home to offer, and that makes the difference.'

Muriel said nothing, and after a pause he added:

'Wealth is not happiness. I am not sure that it is even to be desired. Eight years ago wealth did not make your life easy. You would often have been glad of a change,—any change.'

'O no,' protested Muriel.

'No? But yours was not a happy girlhood. I often felt for you. Your mother's coldness and your grandfather's severity—yes, you had many trials. Poor Lilias and you, too, so uncongenial.'

'A great deal of it all was my own fault.'

'Do you think so? It did not seem so to me at the time. My comfort has been to know how much happier the last years must have been to you.'

'O no, indeed,' said Muriel hastily.

'No! I am surprised; your mother being no longer cold, and your grandfather so changed. Certainly you have other trials to take the place of those. One cannot expect to be without trouble; the danger is of our always thinking the past a happier time than the present. I see the temptation with some minds; past troubles are apt to fade, and past pleasures look brighter than they were in reality.'

Muriel had not much to say in answer. She was very shy, while Montgomery, most bashful of men, was perfectly at his ease.

'As that young man, Mr.—what *is* his name?—said. By the-bye, you know him. What an excellent young fellow he is—charming—charmingly frank and earnest. Mr.—Mr.—living at your old home. I went there, Muriel.'

'Mr. Wentworth,' said Muriel, who was striving to suppress her agitation. 'Yes, he is a good man.'

'Most excellent. What was I going to say about him? Something,—ah, yes, a quotation from the "Christian Year,"—strange, I have just forgotten the subject at this

int. I had it in my mind a moment ago, clear as day-
:'

'ou were speaking about thinking the past happier than
present,' suggested Muriel.

'rue, true, thank you. And that led to the thought
we should not murmur at little losses, privations, disap-
tments. Mr.—what *is* his name?—Wentworth, yes,—
Wentworth and I had some very interesting conversa-
Muriel, on the subject of resignation under losses.'

should not think Mr. Wentworth has had much experi-
in that respect,' said Muriel.

o he remarked; but he may have it yet. Well to be
ired, you know. Wincing and fretting as we do!
in't *He* know best? Muriel it is all well—always well
iatever He wills. Don't let us ever forget that. And
iave had that in your mind, have you, through all your
)les and changes—poor child!'

ittle losses don't always seem little at the time,' mur-
d Muriel.

ust so. They seem often what they are meant to seem,
sore and heavy indeed, almost more than flesh can
. That doesn't hinder their being "little" in compari-
rith joys to come.'

en he laid fingers on some wild flowers strewn over the
cloth, and drew her into a botanical discussion, whence
diverged to other matters. He told her some passages
s own history during the past eight years, and asked
ions concerning hers. Muriel knew as little as she
that over an hour had fled. She became thoroughly
lf once more, and chatted with an animation which had
e somewhat faded out of her life, though he saw in it
what he had been accustomed to.

se at length made her appearance, and Muriel woke
the fact that she would be missed. Montgomery
npanied her, bareheaded, through the garden.

re you going home now?' he asked.

'Not directly. I have some shopping to do.'

'Ah, just so. I think I will go and call upon you mean-time,' he said mildly. 'Good-bye,—I shall again.'

'You will stay some time at Bushby?' said Mu downcast eyes.

'I am not sure. My plans are uncertain. But not be so long.'

'Good-bye,' said Muriel; and she looked up, to gentle short-sighted eyes watching her with an e hardly to be mistaken.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CHECK.

MONTGOMERY found Mrs. Bertram busied in entertaining visitors. He had noticed a dashing yellow carriage outside the garden-gate, with a smart grey-coated footman on the path matching the smart grey-coated coachman on the box. Being shown into the little drawing-room he was welcomed by the hostess with a graciousness which perhaps he valued at more than its right worth, since after the first few words of greeting she gave him but a limited share of attention. A bulky elderly individual, with mottled red complexion, and too loud a voice to suit manners which otherwise were those of a gentleman, engrossed most of the conversation, though certainly not by virtue of his own conversational brilliancy. A shy little widow lady, who had called at the same time, pushed in remarks wherever she could find an opening, in a minute voice which commonly failed to gain a hearing. Montgomery waited in a state of abstraction.

'Thank you, Sir Timothy. I shall count it a *real* favour on your part,' he heard Mrs. Bertram say cordially, and then it flashed across him that the red-faced individual was no absolute stranger. He had forgotten the baronet as completely as the baronet had forgotten him. Now he recalled the days when a certain Sir Timothy Northbrook had half broken Muriel's heart by his persistent seeking of her hand, with the sanction of her mother and grandfather. Was that *game being played over anew?*

The baronet had risen to leave, and Mrs. Bertram stood talking to him. Maxwell was struck with her handsome and youthful looks. He had his wits enough about him to forestall her in ringing the bell, for which she rewarded him by an extra-gracious bend of her head. The yellow carriage with its stout occupant drove away, and the little widow remained some time longer. Mrs. Bertram submitted with polite languor to the infliction, and Montgomery strove after patience.

'Mrs. Stokes never knows when to say good-bye,' Mrs. Bertram remarked, after her departure. 'I was not aware that we had to expect you in Bushby, Mr. Maxwell.'

He would have been wise to converse pleasantly for a while on ordinary subjects, but this was not possible to him. Yet now he had come to the point the plunge was not easy. He felt like a short-haired terrier on the brink of a cold bath. She talked on without effort in her agreeable style, and he, silent and absorbed, sat turning over in his mind how to say his say. He had no notion of delay. Muriel and he would never know one another better than they did already, he reasoned, and he made no count at all of the eight intervening years. While Mrs. Bertram was discussing the weather, and speculating on the possibilities of wet or fine to come, he broke in irrelevantly with the news of his cousin's death, and his own improved condition as to worldly good. Mrs. Bertram congratulated him with unwonted friendliness. She did not particularly care for Mr. Maxwell, but the possession of money was a gratification with which she could cordially sympathise.

Her manner changed a good deal when Maxwell went on in faltering tones to state his hopes. The hopes grew speedily fainter. Mrs. Bertram's fair brow was drawn into very severe lines, and a rather unpleasant look took the place of her congratulatory smile. She had not expected this, but she let him say what he wished, waiting in a most lady-like manner till the conclusion. Maxwell pleaded

earnestly and brokenly. He told of the long years since first he knew his love for Muriel, and of how he had carefully restrained himself and had striven in vain to crush it, and how the sudden change in his position from poverty to ease had bidden him trust that even yet he might win her for his own. The man's deep humility and intense feeling might have touched the heart of any mother, whether or no she could approve. But Mrs. Bertram was not easily touched. 'It is unfortunate, very unfortunate,' she said, quietly flicking a crumb from its resting-place on her flounce. 'I think your resolution to stay away and break yourself of the fancy was a good one. I wish you had kept to it.'

'Eight years have not changed my feelings. Twenty years would not. It is no fancy,' he said, 'it is part of my very self.'

'You would have done better to keep to your resolution, Mr. Maxwell,' she repeated.

'I did—I did; but surely *this* makes a difference.'

'A difference in what respect?'

'I have now a home to offer her. I then had not.'

'Until you had, any such move on your part would have been most improper—in fact, impossible. But I confess I should hardly have expected you even now to come forward. We thoroughly appreciate all your kind attention to Arthur, and Muriel is grateful to you for your teaching in the past. But as for anything else—our former relations——'

She did not say in plain terms, 'You have been a tutor, and a tutor shall never marry Muriel;' but he heard it in her voice, saw it in her face, read it in her manner. The pleasant card structure which had in two days sprung so high, fell with one dull crash to the earth.

'I have other views for Muriel,' she said, after a pause, as he sat looking sadly on the ground.

'Views? Agreeable to her?' he asked slowly.

'Muriel will never marry without my leave; of that I am

sure,' Mrs. Bertram said. 'She is a dutiful daughter—thanks in part to your influence. You see I am not ungrateful.'

'Will you allow me to put one question?' he asked. 'How if Muriel were found—as regarded myself—not unwilling——?'

'I have not the slightest fear of anything of the kind.' Mrs. Bertram spoke with some sharpness. 'It is rather an unnecessary supposition on your part. You do not know Muriel. Eight years make a great difference at her age. She would welcome you warmly, no doubt; has done so, probably, since you say you have met. I wish you had not met, for my part. But she has affectionate recollections of old friendships.'

'We did meet. My hopes were raised, I confess.'

'Of course. No doubt. She is always a great deal too frank in the expression of her thoughts, and misleads people into thinking that she feels more than she really does. But such an idea as this has never entered her head. If it had, I should desire her to put it aside at once, for it can never be. In any case, I could not—would not—*will* not consent. You must please look upon this answer as final. I cannot consent to discuss the question at all. I hope to see Muriel married before many months are over, and married as she should be. But you will oblige me by mentioning this to no one. I am treating you in a friendly way, in telling you so much. For the present it certainly is desirable that you and Muriel should not hold much intercourse. I prefer that her mind should not be disturbed.'

Mrs. Bertram did not move, did not look at the door, did not make any gesture, yet he knew by instinct that she meant him to go. He half rose, and she instantly stood up, thereby making further delay impossible. He said good-bye like a man in a dream, and went slowly. Mrs. Bertram's brow contracted uneasily after his departure. 'Absurd! Ridiculous! Provoking! The man is insane. Muriel marry

quondam tutor—a man old enough to be her father! Non-
nse! I hope she has no notions of the kind in her head.
lare say she has after seeing him. Well, she must put her
lings in her pocket, whatever they are. I will never con-
it—a pretty business that would be.'

Muriel coming in not long after, had a slightly suspicious
k, shyly happy, yet anxious. Mrs. Bertram missed her
al calm of manner. She said once sharply, 'What is the
tter?' and Muriel, with heightened colour, evaded the
stion. Dinner dragged by somewhat heavily, and Mrs.
tram wore her offended air. The evening was yet more
icult to get through. These dull state evenings were ever
ial to Muriel, even in her happiest moods. She might
read, and fancy-work was an employment which she had
er taken to kindly. Mrs. Bertram cared for music only
urposes of display, and thereby spoilt Muriel's enjoyment
laying to her. These were 'under the surface' feelings,
ly allowed to appear, but on this particular evening
iel found it hard to act up to the mark. If she talked
was sure to introduce the wrong subject, and if she was
it Mrs. Bertram wished to know her reasons for being
. After a while Mrs. Bertram remarked suddenly:

So Mr. Maxwell is back in England.'

Has he been here to-day, mamma?'

Yes; you have seen him too.'

I found him at the Vicarage.'

Why did you not tell me before?'

Muriel hesitated. 'He said he was coming here. I sup-
:d you knew. That is one reason.'

I hope he will not stay long. Mr. Maxwell is no favourite
ine, and never was. I never could see what John and
ur saw to like in him. A most tiresome slow forgetful
. He would drive me wild in a week.'

Muriel thought of a dozen things to say, and said none of
n.

He seemed to consider himself quite on an equality with

us, on the score of our losses and his little pittance of six or seven hundred a year—or less I am not sure that Mr. John Holmes had more than five hundred. Either way, I never saw anything in worse taste. I soon let Mr. Maxwell know his mistake. He is not likely to trouble us often.'

'Mamma, he is one of our most faithful old friends,' said Muriel indignantly.

'You need not be tragic; you are not reciting a play.'

Muriel was extinguished. Mrs. Bertram added carelessly:

'It was a most ridiculous scene. He had the audacity to propose for you—*he*, a mere tutor, for Miss Bertram of Claverton Manor! I did not wish to hurt his feelings of course, and I did not say all I felt, but anything more absurd I never heard in my life.'

Muriel's face was not to be mistaken. Mrs. Bertram looked steadily at it, and gave a short laugh.

'I told him the thing was an absolute impossibility—that *you* could not wish it—but that if you did, it should never be.'

'Mamma, you had not asked me. You had no right to tell him that.'

Muriel stood up, pale as ashes, with her hands clasped. She was terrified at the strength of her own tempestuous resentment.

'I told him *my* mind in the matter. If yours is different, the less said about it the better. Mind, Muriel—once and for all, the subject is not to be touched upon again. It is too absurd to merit a moment's thought. I never will consent. Such a *mésalliance* would break my heart. You are all I have now, and to see you throw yourself away on a creature like that is out of the question. I have no fear of your disobeying me. If you did, I would simply have nothing more to do with you. You know that I mean what I say. I am not exaggerating. Mr. Maxwell understands, and you had better understand too. I told him I had other views for you.'

Muriel's fingers had laid tight clench upon the back of a

chair, and her breath came hard and irregularly, with a threatening of sobs between.

'Mamma, I will not disobey you in that,' she said, struggling for calmness. 'I will not marry without your leave. He would not wish it.'

'His wishes are nothing to me. You must please put him out of your head altogether. I should not have mentioned this ridiculous interview to you at all, but I saw when you came in that your mind was full of him. Mind, Muriel—*that* has to be put down. Something very different lies ahead of you.'

'Either that or home with you.'

Mrs. Bertram's head moved scornfully. Muriel's fingers quitted their hold on the chair.

'Mamma, I can't deceive you. I had better speak out at once. I will not marry Mr. Maxwell without your leave, but—I will never marry any one else.'

'You will be so good as to drop the subject,' said Mrs. Bertram, with extreme coldness and displeasure.

Muriel went out of the room, for she could bear no more. Her old wilful and strong temper had not for years so bitterly assailed her as on this night. For an hour she restlessly paced her room, within the locked door, unable to control herself, unable to pray for help. For there are times when the numbing pain of mind is so intense that the very power to cry to God seems frozen, and the only comfort at such a time is just the knowledge that He knows and understands all. She had that comfort, poor girl, down in a secret chamber of her heart, even while feeling for a while as if faith were dead, and hope gone, and as if she were in the very grasp of the Evil One. And yet it was not really so, for her Father's love was round her still, and the Comforter was near to breathe words of peace.

I am not quite sure whether I shall not be expected here to give a word of apology for bringing together two matters *by some counted so incon*gruous, as a love-affair and thoughts

of heavenly help. Yet why should it be so? The matter of all matters which perhaps most nearly concerns the life-happiness of human beings—putting aside the greater question of soul-salvation—is surely not the one which is to be banished beyond the pale of religious influences. Are all other troubles to have fruit in prayer and trust, and not *that* trouble? There is no one item of daily life too great or too small to be the object of God's abounding care; therefore there is no one item which may not be viewed from the Christian as well as from the worldly side.

Of all Muriel's trials this seemed to herself the deepest and the most hopeless. She had to buffet some strong billows before there came a gleam of peace. Life stretching ahead looked in its dreariness almost more than she could bear, and the comforts and joys awaiting her by the roadside were not visible to her sight. Hers was a passionate nature, despite her usual outer calm, and the calm once broken down was not easy to regain. A servant came to the door with a message that Mrs. Bertram wished to see her. Muriel opened the door, and quietly said she 'would go soon,' but the quietness was no real calm. For a while she could not even kneel. A strange sense of repulsion seemed to hold her back from the very attitude of prayer.

That did not last. The cry of 'Father! Help—help me,' came at last, and soon she was down beside her bed, brokenly imploring with sobs the strength she needed; for she knew well that if temper, submission, patience, failed now, Mrs. Bertram would never forget. Every failure of Muriel's would be laid to the score of Muriel's religion. She dreaded so to dishonour her Master, and feared in her weakness to fail. But when one half-hour more had passed, and Muriel came out of her room, she could say with the inspired apostle, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.'

'What on earth have you been doing all this time, Muriel?' asked Mrs. Bertram stiffly, with a displeased look at the tear-traces.

'Mamma, I could not come before,' said Muriel gently.

'It is more than half-an-hour since I sent for you.'

'Yes; I could not come before. I am sorry.'

'"Could not" means "would not," I suppose.'

Muriel was silent. She could submit, but could not discuss.

The evening was to be a broken one seemingly. Connie Rivers presently came tripping in.

'O, I only wanted to know if Mr. Maxwell was here,' she said, looking round. 'He went out early this afternoon, and we have seen nothing of him since. Mamma supposed he was staying here to dinner, but it is nearly eight o'clock now, and she wants to be sure. Then he isn't with you after all?'

'Certainly not,' Mrs. Bertram answered. 'He merely paid a short call.'

'Dear me! Why, what can have become of him? O well, I shouldn't wonder if he had gone to Claverton. He and Mr. Wentworth seem to have taken a great fancy to one another. I shouldn't have thought they would have suited. Perhaps he is at the Manor. Well, we can't do anything, so we must wait till he comes back. He is so absent, I dare say he has forgotten all about the time. Muriel, you aren't well this evening; you look quite pale, and your eyes are so heavy.'

'Muriel has a headache,' said Mrs. Bertram with promptitude, and the remark happily contained sufficient truth to pass unchallenged.

'A turn in the garden would do you more good than anything. Do come with me, Muriel, for ten minutes; it is a lovely evening; such a moon!'

Before Muriel could answer, or Mrs. Bertram object, the parlour-maid appeared.

'If you please, Miss Bertram, there is a young person very anxious to speak to you. She would not give any name but she says her mother is dying and wants to see you.'

'Insist upon having her name,' said Mrs. Bertram, but Muriel went towards the door.

'No, it does not matter. I will speak to her.'

'And I may as well go,' said Connie. 'Good-bye, Murie. Mind you have a good night. I don't like to see you so pale. Don't you wonder what can have become of Mr. Maxwell?' And outside the door, Connie contrived to whisper, squeezing her cousin's hand the while,—'Murie, darling, he is your good Mr. Maxwell, isn't he? And do you know he is so nice. It seems such a comfort to papa to have him with us. And I like him every inch as much as you do.'

After which, Connie ran away, and Muriel proceeded to the dining-room.

'I am Pauline,' a faltering voice said, as she stood before a slight figure, cloaked and veiled. The veil was thrown back, and the large liquid black eyes, which had in the morning taken her heart by storm, looked mournfully in her face. How long ago the morning seemed! Muriel felt herself almost another creature. The little scene upon the road had faded out of her thoughts, but now it came back vividly.

'I am Pauline, and you said I might come. This isn't the right time, is it, Miss Bertram? It is too late at night. But mother is so ill—O so ill—and I have nobody to go to.'

'What is the matter with your mother?' asked Muriel.

'I don't know—at least not exactly. It is some dreadful internal pain. Mother says that—and she says the doctor once told her she could never be better. But the journey has made her so bad—and she is so afraid to have to die. O I don't wonder,' said Pauline passionately. 'It is dreadful to have to die!'

'It would not be to me,' said Muriel.

'Ah, but you are good. Mother is not good. I love her because she is my mother, but I know she isn't good. If *you only* could come and see her,' implored Pauline. 'You

said you would, and I couldn't leave mother till now to ask you.'

'To-morrow morning will not do?' asked Muriel.

'Mother doesn't think she will live till the morning.'

'She ought to see the doctor.'

'Mother would rather see you. It is the one thing she wants. She cries and cries out for you; but I couldn't leave her sooner, she was so ill.'

Muriel looked doubtfully at Pauline. 'I do not understand,' she said. 'Why should your mother wish to see me? We are strangers.'

'I told her about you—how kind you were. She would rather see you now than Mrs. Bertram. If you only could come.'

'Where are you staying?'

'It is the little street behind the post-office—Number Three, an upstairs room.'

'And your mother's name?'

'I'll show you the way there—if I may.'

'No. Your mother's name first,' said Muriel gravely, with a touch of suspicion.

The brown cheeks were crimson in an instant, and the eyes suffused.

'Does your mother object to my knowing her name?'

'She said I was to say—Mrs. Smith.'

'Why did you not?'

Pauline hid her face in her hands. 'I couldn't,' she said in a choked tone. 'I couldn't.'

'Then it is not true?'

A long pause was followed by 'No.'

'*You* are truthful, Pauline,' said Muriel.

'I've learnt to be. Indeed, indeed, you will know by-and-by why mother wants to see you before she tells you her name.'

Muriel stood in utter perplexity what to do and what not to do. The mystery might be this or that, but in any event

it was scarcely likely to be pleasing to her mother. Gradually she decided to put aside the thought of what she did not know, and to act upon what she did know. A dying woman entreating to see her might not lightly be denied.

'I will speak to my mother, and if possible come with you,' she said. 'I think you are telling me the truth, Pauline. Poor child—don't cry.'

'It has been so dreadful. I didn't know how to get through the day,' sobbed Pauline. 'Nobody to help us, and not even a landlady that we know. Mother *would* come to Bushby, though I did try to keep her away.'

'I will speak to my mother at once,' repeated Muriel, and she went across the passage, thinking, 'After all there are worse troubles than mine.'

'Well, what is it all about?' Mrs. Bertram inquired chillingly.

'A poor woman is dying near the post-office. She is very anxious to see me, and may not live till the morning. I must go to her at once.'

'Nonsense! At this time of night! A person whom you know nothing about! Who is she?'

'She is dying. I don't think I could have a stronger call than that.'

Mrs. Bertram shivered. 'I wish you would lose your blunt way of speaking on such subjects. I object to it extremely. You will act as you please, of course. *I* have nothing to do with the matter. I only beg that you will not pester me with particulars. You must take a servant with you.'

Muriel was astonished, having expected no such quick permission. Possibly Mrs. Bertram's worldly wisdom inclined to the belief that a variety of interests was not unadvisable at that juncture.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

UNDESIRABLE RELATIVES.

MOTHER, I have brought Miss Bertram to see you. Mother, look up.'

The sick woman moaned and moved querulously. 'You've been gone such a time, Pauline. I couldn't think what you were after.'

'But I have brought Miss Bertram. Look, mother; she has come; just as you wanted. Isn't it kind? I went as fast as ever I could.'

The woman breathed heavily, and her sallow fingers twitched in a nervous helpless fashion. She turned her head suddenly, and looked straight up into the face that was watching her, with a curious half-defiant gaze.

'You are very ill,' said Muriel gently. 'Can I do anything for you?'

'That isn't news,' she said crustily. 'I'm as ill as a body can be this side of the grave pretty nearly. Last night was as much as flesh and blood can stand. I shan't live through another such. And there's Pauline——'

'I have sent my servant to call the doctor while I am here,' said Muriel. 'Have you been long like this?'

'It's come on—gradual. I'm worse now than I've been yet; and nobody but that child to help me. She isn't so old as she looks;' for Muriel's eyes went involuntarily to the slender well-grown figure. 'She's fifteen; six months off sixteen.'

Muriel wondered no longer at the impulsive manners, and child-like looks of appeal.

'Have you no friends—no relatives—to help you?' she asked.

'There's relatives, if they'd be friends. There's nobody I can turn to.'

'But you have seen a doctor?' Muriel did not know what to think of her state. A certain vigour of speech, despite the woman's shrunken and wasted appearance, made her question whether death were so near as mother and daughter seemed to expect.

'Doctors are no good. They can do nothing for me. I don't believe in doctors; not one of them.'

Muriel was quick to seize opportunities. She did not let this pass. Standing there by the old worm-eaten bed, over which a yellowish-white counterpane with ragged edges hung crookedly, her own gracefully-dressed figure contrasting with the shabby surroundings, while Pauline leaned upon the footboard, and watched with thirsty eyes—standing thus, she took up quietly the last-spoken words, and said, 'No, not in doctors, perhaps. But do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?'

The woman started, for the question came unexpectedly. Some excitement showed through the restless workings of her features.

'Folks talk a lot about believing. Yes, I suppose I do. Pauline, get a chair for Miss Bertram—she may as well sit; and you needn't stand staring like that. I'm not so bad as I was, if the pain doesn't come back. Maybe it's only the journey, and I'll feel better to-morrow.'

Muriel could not hazard an opinion. There was a death-like ghastliness of complexion, yet she was plainly removed many degrees from the last stages of exhaustion. A poor repellent creature she seemed, with those black prominent suspicious eyes. But Muriel did not feel repelled. For the value of human life is not to be

asured by outward attractions, and the awful price that
paid for the life of man in the life of the Son of God,
paid equally for the lowest and most repulsive as for the
atest and most admired among men. 'There is no dif-
nce, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of
d.'

Muriel took the offered seat, but did not lose sight of her
ect. 'If you believe, you are happy,' she said. 'The
le tells us, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou
lt be saved.''

Yes, I know that,' the woman said, with a touch of
atience.

And you do believe on Him?'

Yes, it's all true, of course.'

What is all true?'

Why, all you're telling me.'

All what? I want you to come to the point. A little
ing does not hurt you; does it?'

O no, it doesn't hurt me, except when the worst of the
n is on, and then I'm fit for nothing.'

What is it that you do believe? Try to tell me
nly.'

This was not the manner of conversation which the
nan had wished. She hesitated, trying to fix upon the
n of speech most likely to close the subject.

How often do you read the Bible?' asked Muriel, as
nce continued.

I believe the Bible, Miss Bertram,' was the hasty
wer.

The Bible, and all in it. Then you believe that you are a
ner, and that no sinner unforgiven can ever go to
ven.'

Yes,' rather uneasily.

And that God is most loving and merciful, but also
st holy and just.'

Yes,' again.

'And that the Lord Jesus Christ, in love to you, died upon the cross to save you from death.'

'O yes; He died for the world. I know all that, Miss Bertram.'

'And that He died for you, you yourself. Do you believe that?'

'Of course it's all true. Everybody knows it.'

'We are not thinking about "everybody." Can you honestly say that down in your very heart you believe and know, that Jesus, the Son of God, in His deep love for you, died a cruel death for you, and waits to save you from everlasting death?'

There was no answer. Muriel's earnest look was not met.

'No, you do not believe it,' she said in a low voice.

'Nobody has a right to tell me I don't. Why shouldn't I believe it, if I choose to say I do, as much as you or anybody?'

'Because if you believed it, you could not live apart from Him, could not help loving Him. Suppose you loved Pauline so much that you died for her sake, do you think Pauline could help loving your memory for it with all her heart? If she believed that you had done so, she could not feel cold about it. It isn't in the nature of things that she should. But you don't love the Lord Jesus. You don't feel any gratitude, you don't care to serve Him. How can I think you really believe in His love for you?'

'It doesn't look much like God loving me, the sort of troubles I've had to bear,' she said sullenly.

'Ah, now we are getting to the root of the matter. I would much rather you should say what you really feel. You don't believe in the love of God. I saw that at once. You don't know the Lord Jesus at all. He is nothing to you.'

'I suppose one may have a sort of feeling, without meaning all you're saying,' was the answer.

'You may have many sorts, but they will not take you to heaven. "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." That is what the Bible says. And, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Do you think you "know" Him in that sense? Is God really your Father?—and Jesus your Saviour?—and the Holy Spirit living in your heart, teaching and leading you?'

'I haven't much time left me, Miss Bertram, and I don't know about all that. I'll have to go on as I've begun, and God is merciful. I've no fear but it'll all be right at the last.'

'And how if you find it is not? You refuse God's way, and hope your own will lead you right. If you read your Bible, you would find no such hope there,' said Muriel, moved and sorrowful. 'Better far to be one of the heathen, not knowing the very name of Christ, than to have your Bible and refuse to hear what God says in it. You have time still, time enough to let you come to Christ for pardon. It did not take the thief upon the cross long to find safety. Do you think the other thief went to Paradise too? You see *he* did not repent or ask to be saved.'

Had the words struck home or not? Muriel could not tell? The woman was silent, with downward-bent eyes, and sullenly-protruded under lip. Before Muriel had decided what next to say, the doctor came.

Muriel waited through the examination, telling her servant to remain outside the door. The housemaid took this as a matter of course, and would have done far more disagreeable things for her dearly-loved younger mistress. Mr. Bryce was young still. Some prophesied for him a better position in his profession than even that of Dr. Peters. He was commonly counted clever, though his appearance was rather against him.

'I shan't get over this,' the sick woman said, looking full at him. '*I know that as well* as you, so you needn't talk *smooth to me. How long* do you suppose I shall last?'

Mr. Bryce could not possibly say; he did not attempt to conceal that he thought her case a very bad one. Life might be a matter of weeks or even days. He was not able to speak with certainty. On the other hand, he did not feel absolutely convinced that a measure of recovery was out of the question. The case was complex and unusual in some respects. She had done herself much harm by travelling when quiet was essential.

'I'd do it over again if I had it to do,' she said shortly. 'But I can't afford to have doctor's calls every day; I'm as poor as any of your parish folks.'

The tone and manner of speech were singular, making him remark, 'I suppose you are not English.'

'No, but my husband was.'

'Well, you need not trouble yourself about the expense,' said Mr. Bryce, and Muriel liked the way in which the words were spoken. 'By-the-bye, I have not asked your name?'

Muriel did not know why the silence following should make her heart beat fast. Mother and daughter exchanged glances, and the doctor looked surprised.

'Mrs. Bertram.'

Mr. Bryce started visibly, and could not help looking at Muriel. Her heart gave one fierce throb, and then seemed to stop with a sensation of sudden faintness. But she had been pale before, and her colour scarcely varied. She said in her calmest tone,—

'Singular!'

'Very singular,' said Mr. Bryce. 'I will send some medicine.'

Muriel followed him to the door, to say in an undertone. 'I intended the expense to be my own affair.'

'O, thank you—thanks,' rather embarrassed. 'I could not think of it. Very glad to help the poor woman. I shouldn't think she would ever be better. She seems poor.'

'Very poor, I imagine. I never saw her before this even-

ing, and her name has been unknown to me until this moment. She has not been long in Bushby?'

'No; curious coincidence. Not a very uncommon name,' said the young doctor, extremely anxious to say the polite thing.

'I suppose not. Good-evening.'

'There, I've done it now,' she heard as she went back. 'You've got your way, so you needn't cry, you silly chit. What do you want me to have said, then?'

Muriel stood by the bedside, one black-gloved hand lying lightly across the other, and her head reined back with unconscious dignity. Pauline was kneeling on the floor in an attitude of distress, sobbing, with her face hidden on the cane seat of a chair.

'You didn't expect that,' said Mrs. James Bertram, looking up into Muriel's face; 'you didn't expect that, did you? I wouldn't have told you so soon, but that silly child wouldn't let me call myself Mrs. Smith. Folks can't go on without a name of some sort. I'm Mrs. Bertram, and my husband was your father's brother. I'm aunt by marriage to you, and Pauline and you are cousins. That's a near tie, if anything is. Pauline calling you *Miss* Bertram sounds odd, doesn't it? If I knew your name—but I don't——Well, oughtn't cousins to kiss?'

That freedom of speech was not likely to be at once repeated. Muriel's bearing was haughtiness itself at the moment. Could it be true? She did not know. A sense of sickening disgust, almost of loathing, crept over her, at the bare idea of such a possibility. She had been trained in a fastidious school.

'You forget yourself,' she said, retreating a pace from the bed. 'Your tale is entirely unproved, and without full proof I have nothing to say to it.'

'My name's Mrs. Bertram. I have no other name. My husband was your father's brother, and I've papers that'll prove it fast enough,' said the woman, looking curiously at

Muriel, but speaking with more respect. 'Would you like to see them to-night?'

'Not to-night; I cannot wait longer. But there may be many Bertrams not related to ourselves. The less you say about that part of the matter to anyone the better, at present. Good-evening. I hope to find you better in a few days. If you are worse at any time you may send me word.'

She spoke in a measured tone, bending her head coldly, with quite her mother's air. Pauline stood up, shy and unhappy, and received a kind word in passing.

'Pride enough there,' muttered Mrs. Bertram pretty audibly, and the words reached Muriel.

She went down the stairs heavily, followed by her patient attendant, feeling that she had borne enough excitement for one day. The walk home was an effort. 'You are not well, Miss Bertram. Seeing that woman has been too much for you,' the housemaid said once.

'I am not poorly, only tired,' said Muriel. They were turning into the road which ran past the garden-gate of Elm Villa. Though walking slowly, they overtook a man walking more slowly still.

The country lay under a sheet of silver moonlight this night, stars being almost lost in the brightness overhead while across the white road at their feet lay black tree shadows. The man, with hat in hand and face uplifted seemed enjoying the soft glow. Muriel had a distinct view c his face, and exclaimed slightly to herself. He turned ir stantly.

'Is that Muriel?'

'Yes!'

'Out so late?'

'I had to see a poor woman.'

'Ah! that was kind. But you are tired; yes, I can se that. Take my arm, Muriel; only a few paces more. I a glad to have met you, for I must leave Bushby early t morrow.'

housemaid went swiftly on ahead to get the door
l. Muriel said nothing; it seemed to come about
lly.
l you know I called on Mrs. Bertram to-day?' he asked.
s, mamma told me——'
l she tell you what passed?'
s.'
ave had to fight a sore battle since,' he said. He knew
e had, too, by the shiver which passed through her.
annot disobey mamma,' said Muriel, with difficulty.
, no, you are right; no, it would not bring happiness.
ıld not look for God's blessing.'
ın't disobey her actively. Passively, perhaps—I may
ged. I mean, I can't be forced into whatever she may

: if she had been willing, Muriel; if she had—this—
think this could ever have been possible?' he asked.
again answered simply, 'Yes.'
ınk God for *that*,' he said joyously. Disappointment
ɔ the background with him at the moment. Having
ı assurance he could bear much. His next few words
onfused, and so were Muriel's. She said at length,
na talks of "other views" for me. I told her they—
ɔt possible.'
ll, we may hope,' he said. 'Many things come about
e does not expect, and difficulties clear away. We
ee far ahead, but we may hope; and meantime we
arn our lesson.'
at lesson?' She was longing for a word to bring
ı or comfort.
ıve been trying to shape my lips to it to-day. It was
y at first. "Thy will be done;" "So it seemed good
sight." We don't need any other reason, do we?
seems good" to Him to make us wait, we must be
,

el could not speak. He bent his head towards her,

smiling. 'We mustn't murmur, must we?' he said. 'All will come right, Muriel—in this world or the next.'

He took her hand, and shook it slowly. 'Poor child—good-bye. We must say good-bye. I am selfish enough to be glad of so much. But it might be happier for you, the other way. Don't get out of heart, Muriel; we must be brave and look out—look on—look up. God is with us both, you know, even when we are parted. He has been all these years, hasn't He? Tell your mother we have had this little chat. I don't think it is wrong, only all must be above-board. We cannot do anything without her consent, but *I* shall never change—never. And she may change. I shall wait and hope for that day. Good-bye; you will hear of me sometimes—somehow—and I of you.'

He stood till the door closed behind her, and then went on to the Vicarage, where he found Rose and John waiting up for him, in a state of no small anxiety and alarm. 'My dear fellow, what *have* you been about?' demanded John. 'All these hours absent, without warning! You are a cruel inmate for folks with nerves.'

'Or even for folks without, who have some care for their friends,' added Rose. 'But I told John you would turn up before long. Where did you dine, Mr. Maxwell?'

'I—I did not dine—particularly—anywhere,' hesitated Mr. Maxwell. 'I have been walking in the lanes.'

'Feasting on science! Ever since four! Were you botanising?'

'No; not exactly—not precisely—no, no.'

'No wonder the man looks like a ghost; from four till eleven on his legs,' said John.

'No, I assure you—I beg your pardon,—I assure you, John, I had a long rest. I sat down several times; and at last I lost my way.'

'You lose your way near Bushby! If I could have supposed such an event within the bounds of possibility, it would have eased my mind immensely.'

'I think I have not the organ of locality,' said Maxwell with meekness. 'And the lanes are very much alike—very much indeed. I only took a wrong turning.'

'Rose, is he to have a meal?'

'I am in no hurry—I assure you, I am in no hurry. I do not feel at all hungry. I could wait for breakfast with the greatest ease.'

This suggestion was not likely to be acceded to. Montgomery soon had before him a full plate, whereof he ate dreamily. John, with a book open, and thin fingers sheltering his eyes, sat at the same table. Evening was his best time, but he looked very frail.

'This is late for you, John,' said Maxwell presently.

'I never go to bed early. My aim is to shorten night as much as possible.'

'You don't sleep well?'

'It is all discomfort.' John did not speak complainingly, but he put aside the book, and leant back with a wearied air. 'Has yours been a happy day among the bushes?'

Rose flitted away, and Maxwell laid down his knife and fork thoughtfully.

'There are different kinds of happiness—yes, different kinds.'

'Such as——'

'There is the happiness of having the heart's desire granted by God. There is the happiness of having the heart's desire refused by God and of finding it possible still to say, "Thy will, not mine."'

'Seeming denial is sometimes only postponement,' John observed. 'Maxwell, you have not said much this week—but I am an observer. Have you been thinking too much about Muriel? Pardon my boldness.'

'Not thinking too much—no—only hoping a little too much. Nothing new, John. It is an old old matter with me. Only I ventured to speak to Mrs. Bertram.'

'And she gave you a rebuff? Did you expect anything

else? Don't you know my aunt better, after all your experience of her?'

'I thought—I confess I thought things were different. But I see my mistake. It is well for a man to learn his true position. I am only an old tutor after all.'

'Did Muriel know what passed?'

'Yes. I am not sure how far I was justified in telling her; but I met her, and finding that she had heard of my visit from Mrs. Bertram, I spoke somewhat plainly. You will no doubt hear all from them. But, indeed, I think I had a right to say so much. I think she had a right to know.'

'Well, Muriel is a woman of thirty-three—no mere chicken. What is to be done?'

'Nothing. Mrs. Bertram refuses consent.'

'And the matter rests there?'

'It rests there.'

'Till—when?'

Montgomery gave a gentle smile.

'If you can see ahead, John, you are wiser than I. There is room for trust and patience.'

'I wish you had her,' said John, with a deep sigh.

'The sky may clear soon. We don't know,' said Maxwell with a calmness which rather surprised John. Perhaps at present the joy of knowing what Muriel felt more than counterbalanced the disappointment of knowing what Mrs. Bertram felt. 'Meantime I can't live an idle life. What do you mean to do with your boys when you go abroad?'

'I wish I could answer you. That is one of our difficulties. However, I believe we are near a decision.'

'School for them all?'

'Willie and Johnnie certainly. That is almost settled. Artie and Frankie are delicate, not fit to "rough it."'

'Just so. I thought of that. I can't be idle, John, you know. Artie and Frankie will come and live with me, and cheer me up. You don't know what an enjoyment it would be.'

'You must let me have your private prospectus.'

Maxwell wrote something on a half-sheet of blank paper, and gave it to him.

Expenses of home with M. M. for two dear boys.

	£	s.	d.
Board and lodging	0	0	0
Education	0	0	0
Extras	0	0	0
Total . .	£0	0	0

'No, no!' said John emphatically.

'Yes,' said Maxwell.

And half-an-hour's talk ended in Montgomery's will gaining the mastery. John's difficulties as to going abroad were thereby solved.

'You don't really mind, you know. If God sends you the need, and me the means, isn't it a simple matter of right that I should help you, John?' Maxwell said in conclusion, If this is His will, you ought to be as pleased as I am to have it so.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN.

MURIEL was utterly bewildered what to do, or where to turn. She tossed sleeplessly to and fro, through hours of the night, striving to see her way. Should she tell her mother at once of the claimed relationship? Muriel shrank with a sensation of positive fear from such a step. She had never felt herself a coward before; but the very strength of her own distaste and hurt pride at the discovery let her a little into what Mrs. Bertram might feel. And after all the story might be untrue. Would it not be cruel to inflict such a shock without absolute need?

Whom should she consult? She had a longing for some human sympathy and advice. But there seemed no one except John, and her chief wish for months past had been to spare John.

She came down to breakfast undecided still, and feeling depressed and irritable. Mrs. Bertram wore her coldest manner. The meal was a silent affair, till Mrs. Bertram remarked, 'You seem to have very few ideas this morning.'

'Mamma, I want to tell you of something that happened last night,' said Muriel, and Mrs. Bertram listened with annoyed looks to a rather faltering sketch of the short interview with Montgomery.

'Mr. Maxwell thought you ought to know, mamma.'

'I have nothing to do with Mr. Maxwell, nor have you *either*. Pray to remember that I prefer not to hear his *name* mentioned.'

In her complete uncertainty what line of action to adopt, Muriel made an allusion to the sick woman who had asked for her. That was put down with a decided hand. Mrs. Bertram did not wish to hear anything about sick women. The subject was an unpleasant one. If Muriel chose to go to disagreeable scenes, she might keep them to herself.

A consultation with John seemed the only resource. Muriel had almost made up her mind to it. For two hours after breakfast, however, Mrs. Bertram kept her closely employed indoors. At the end of that time, Connie appeared, troubled and even tearful.

John had had a very bad night, 'one of the worst he ever had,' Connie said; Dr. Peters had been in, and had said that if John were not off at once, he would not be able to go at all. Too long delay had taken place already. 'He thinks papa much worse than a month ago,' half-sobbed Constance, 'and he wants him to be off in three days. Papa is so weak this morning that he can hardly stand. Mr. Maxwell is so good. He would arrange everything. All the boys are to go to his house directly, and he will settle on the right school for Willie and Johnnie; and Artie and Frankie are to live with him, and he will find a second curate, and do all that has to be done. Mr. Forbes can manage for a Sunday or two without help. And papa and mamma and I are to go straight off to Cannes, and try how he does,—and perhaps we shall go to Egypt from there. Papa doesn't like the Australian plan. He dreads it so much that Dr. Peters says we had better give it up for the present. And we couldn't start for Australia possibly in such a hurry, though of course we have been getting ready a long time to leave home. And Mr. Maxwell has gone off to London by the early train, because he wants to be at his home the day after to-morrow to take the boys in. And papa and mamma wish to see Muriel.'

Connie twined her arm round Muriel's waist, and looked up at her *lovingly*. '*I* can't bear to leave you, Murie, or to

say good-bye to the boys. If it were not for all that, I should like going. And, oh, don't you hope it will do dear papa good?'

Muriel put on bonnet and jacket at once to go with Connie, Mrs. Bertram making no objection, since Maxwell was absent. She found the Vicarage in something of a turmoil; Rose packing and putting away, with no time for more than a word. John lay on the drawing-room sofa, exhausted and voiceless. 'I have been trying to write a letter or two, but I can't manage it,' he whispered. 'Thank you for coming.'

'Can I write any for you?'

'Could you? That packet ought to be answered.'

Muriel looked through it, and wrote replies rapidly, exercising her own discretion. She had an hour's hard work, during which John never moved. At the end of her task, she said, 'Shall I read my answers to Rose?'

'No—to me. Rose is busy. I daresay they are all right.'

Hardly a sentence was found to need alteration. 'You are a good business-woman,' he said.

'I am pretty well up in Bushby affairs. But there are some happy guesses in those letters. Have you been asleep, John?'

'No; resting—and studying you.'

'I am not worth being studied.'

'Do you really think so?'

She arranged his writing-case, with a half smile.

'It won't do to press that question too far. Mine is not genuine humility, John.'

'Well—if you thought it so I should be afraid that you were farther off from humility than you are,' said John. 'Mind you write to us often, Murie. We shall keep you informed.'

'And you must take care of yourself; you must get on.'

'If it is to be—I shall.'

'The boys are going to Mr. Maxwell's, Connie says.' Muriel spoke with downcast eyes.

'Yes; he would not let us speak of any other arrangement. I never knew Maxwell so determined. He settled everything with Rose, for I could do no more than protest mutely.'

'They will be in good hands,' she said in a wistful way, unlike herself.

'The best. Here, Murie——'

John raised himself on one elbow, and took a good look into her face. She turned half away.

'Talking is bad for you.'

'I am better now—I have had a good rest. Sit down here.'

Muriel obeyed, and submitted to be criticised. She could not quite stand it, however. A flush came first, and tears followed. Muriel's hand went up to her eyes.

'Eh? Qu'est-ce que c'est?' asked John.

'I don't know. All these changes—and worries—and not knowing how to act——'

'You would like life to be smooth, would you not? But life is not smooth, Murie; God does not make it so for us.'

'I do not expect smoothness. One must have trials,' she said.

'Yes, one must. And you are willing to have trials—only not those particular trials which you have. O Muriel! Muriel!—Like the rest of the world. How resigned we all are to what we have not to bear.'

'Not you, John.'

'I! As if I don't know what it is. Do you think the tempter did not come whispering in my heart last night, that almost any trouble in the world would be less sad to me than this illness, with all that it entails?'

'What do you do at such times?'

'What you must do. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." He will carry it and sustain thee,—*if you will let Him.* Why don't you?'

She moved her head slightly.

'There was a time, years ago, when you and I talked and thought a good deal about rejoicing always in the Lord, even in dark days. Do you ever think of it now?' he asked.

'Yes. Not just lately, John—not so much,' she said. 'I seem to have been forgetting.'

'You told me once you had learnt to sing when your cage was darkened. Take care you don't make more darkening a necessity. Cheeriness honours Christ, Muriel; don't forget that. It is a trying time for you, I know, and it may go on being so. But don't get into a habit of depression on any account. Fight against it, and look on the bright side of things. Changes are not always for the worse; they are quite as often for the better. How would you like to have Arthur here as curate?'

'Arthur! I should be glad.'

'Mr. Maxwell seemed to think it not impossible. He fancies that some change is brewing, and Arthur may be glad to come. Mr. Forbes and Arthur could keep the parish going. However, you will see. Don't set your heart on it.'

John had talked too much, and coughing came on. Muriel did what she could for him, and then went to help Rose, whose bright though tired face, seen in the light of the past conversation, was a rebuke to her. She was startled to find, on looking back, how much of a repining spirit she had allowed of late. 'It must be put down,' she said resolutely to herself, as she went to and fro, and some silent prayer followed. Later, when she was going home, John said quietly, 'Ah, I am glad to see that face;' and at luncheon Mrs. Bertram remarked,

'I suppose John is better.'

'Better! O no—I wish he were.'

'I thought you did not seem particularly distressed.'

Muriel could not offer any explanation, for it would not have been understood. She had made up her mind on one point, to say nothing to John about Mrs. James Bertram

and Pauline, before his departure. During the three intervening days she did not again go near them. It was an anxious question with herself, whether she was right to stay away, or whether she ought at all risks to have visited the sick woman. Somehow she decided against the latter step, constant occupation at the Vicarage and extreme disinclination of mind having each something to do with the matter.

Three days did not seem long to wait. But Muriel unexpectedly caught cold, and on the morning after John's departure she woke up hoarse. Mrs. Bertram would not hear of her leaving the house.

'I wanted particularly to see one or two people,' Muriel said after breakfast. 'If I wrap up warmly a quick walk will not hurt me.'

'Walk out in this keen wind, with your throat in that condition! You are insane, Muriel. I could not consent to such a thing for a moment.'

'But my colds are never very bad.'

'This will be, if you don't take care.'

Muriel had no choice but to submit. She was aware of a certain need to take reasonable precautions, since her constitution had not escaped a touch of the family delicacy, but it was irksome to have to take precautions this particular day. Though by no means looking forward with pleasure to again meeting Mrs. James Bertram, she felt that a visit ought to be paid. It was needful to test the truth of what had been asserted, and needful to decide on her own line of conduct. Moreover, a whole day indoors, just after parting with John and Rose, was not provocative of cheerfulness.

The second post brought Mrs. Bertram two letters, one from her son.

'Arthur is coming to Bushby!' she exclaimed.

'O, that is good news,' said Muriel.

'Not for two months. He can't get away sooner. Mr. Boynton will let him off one month. This seems to fit in with *some expected changes*. Arthur asks if he may sleep

at home. Of course. What else should he do? A note from Miss Wentworth.'

'It has the look of an invitation,' said Muriel.

'Yes. A curious kind of invitation. The Manor is to be used for a Sunday-school teachers' tea, and Miss Wentworth asks us to be present and give help.'

Sunday-school teachers' teas were so completely out of Mrs. Bertram's province, that Muriel only said with a little laugh, 'Easily declined.'

'I do not see why we should not go.'

'Mamma, you would not like it.'

'That is as may be. I like the Wentworths themselves. They cannot ask us to dinner till we have asked them, but there is evidently a wish to see more of us.'

'I would rather go anywhere than to the Manor.'

'One may give way too much to sentiment,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'It will be trying of course, the first time. But that has to be borne. We owe a duty to society.'

Muriel did not see the force of the closing sentence as applied to the subject in hand. She found it difficult to refrain from a look of something like vexation.

'I shall certainly write and accept. I am surprised at your not taking up the proposal more cordially, Muriel,—you who make so much of good works, and all that sort of thing. There is no reason whatever why we should not go. Next Tuesday; just a week distant. You will have to nurse your cold in preparation.'

Muriel was disposed to laugh at the idea of nursing her cold for a week, but it happened to be a truer word than she had expected. The chill had been disregarded at first, and proved somewhat severe. She was voiceless for two days following, and pain and oppression of the chest came next. To keep Muriel in bed was beyond even Mrs. Bertram's power, but Muriel herself could not deny that to venture out of doors might be somewhat imprudent. Agitation of mind acting on the nervous system probably had to do with the

or she was really unwell, feverish, languid, and able to employ herself. Muriel began to wonder she would be able to venture out even so soon as arty evening, and whether Mrs. Bertram would go that case.

ver, decisive amendment set in before then, and by she was almost herself again. Mrs. Bertram kept ors resolutely,—plainly determined that no fresh uld stand in the way of the Manor plan.

ıought of the James Bertrams was a real anxiety of Muriel. She could not go; she could not send. ote, she must address to 'Mrs. Bertram,' and with- er proof of the truth of the tale, Muriel could not) her mind to seem to sanction it. The same stood in the way of a messenger. The servant who mpanied her could have found the room again with : to send her without telling her for whom she had as not possible. Muriel came to the conclusion could only wait. Sometimes she half expected o appear, but Pauline did not. Sometimes she re- hat she had not at once gone fully into the question aving Mrs. James Bertram; but regrets now were pro- At the time she had not felt calm enough to do so. uesday Mrs. Bertram remarked, 'You had better tle turn with me this morning. It is a lovely day, may as well get used to the air.'

d I not go into Bushby? I really have no cough entioning now.'

here?'

or two visits.'

ng the poor? That can wait till to-morrow. I am ; to have you do yourself up before the evening. d has pulled you down.'

a great deal more "done up" with want of air and ' said Muriel, suppressing a yawn. 'I feel as if this nprisonment had taken away all my ideas.'

'I beg you will find some before this evening. On no account favour us with one of your silent moods. You can talk well if you choose.'

'I'll try,' was all Muriel could say.

'I'm better to-day, Pauline,' Mrs. James Bertram said that same morning.

'Mother, you look better a great deal,' said Pauline.

'Yes, and I feel so. But it won't last. I must make the most of the well fit while it is on me.'

'Perhaps if you took very very great care, it would last,' said Pauline anxiously. 'Don't you think so, mother? It might. The doctor said yesterday we weren't to give up hope; and if you kept perfectly still, and didn't get excited——'

'That's all very fine. How much money do you suppose we've got left?'

Pauline hung her head, and was silent.

'And what are we going to do when that's gone?'

Still no answer.

'You see, child; you see it won't do. Things can't go on so. Here's ten days we have waited, and not a word from Miss Bertram. She don't mean to have anything more to do with us; that's plain.'

'I don't think it is. O mother, we don't know. You said yesterday to the doctor that Miss Bertram hadn't been again; and he said he believed she wasn't well. You know he said so; and if she is ill, how can she come?'

'She isn't ill; no more ill than you are. He's in league with her, and she doesn't mean to have a word more to say to us. *I* don't mean to keep the matter quiet any longer, I can tell her that. I don't—so there—you needn't cry. If you won't see Mrs. Bertram, I will.'

'Mother, you can't—you couldn't. It would kill you. O do let us wait!' implored Pauline.

'Will you go, Pauline?'

Pauline shook her head.

'Mind, I mean every word I say,' said Mrs. James Bertram. 'I'm not going on like this any longer.'

'What should I have to do if I went?' asked Pauline.

'Ask for Mrs. Bertram—*Mrs.*, not Miss. I don't trust that Miss Bertram. She wants to put us off. Mind you ask for Mrs. Bertram, and send in your name as Miss Bertram. And if she refuses, you just tell the servant out and out that you're her niece, and that you won't go without you've seen her.'

Pauline wrung her little brown hands together. 'I can't do it,' she said. 'I can't do it. Mother, I can't. It is no use to ask me. O, I wish, I do wish we had never come to Bushby.'

'If we hadn't I would come now.'

Mrs. Bertram lay and considered; her thin sallow lips pressed together.

'Couldn't we just wait a little longer?' pleaded Pauline. 'Miss Bertram meant to come again. I think she will come. I am sure she is kind. O mother, don't you think if we tried to pray to God, He would take care of us?'

Mrs. Bertram looked curiously at Pauline. 'What do you mean, child?'

'I wish we really did pray,' said Pauline in a low voice.

'Folks have to act for themselves, pray or not pray,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'That's what I've found in life. There's trouble enough either way.'

'But did you ever try the praying, mother?'

It was a keen little shaft, unknown to the sender, and Mrs. Bertram felt it so.

'Other people have, if I haven't. It doesn't matter. I've got something else to think about now. Get me my packet of papers.'

Pauline obeyed, with feelings of disquiet. She did not know what might be coming. Her mother had certainly seemed to rally wonderfully the last two days, yet she suffered

acutely still, and was worn to skin and bone. Pauline stood silent, bracing herself for resistance.

'That's all that's needed,' said Mrs. Bertram, folding a few letters and papers together. 'Here, tie up these, and put them back safely. If you go you'll have to take something with you to prove your words. Miss Bertram wanted proof, and she shall have it too.'

'I'm not going, mother.' The tone was resolute, and Pauline stood very straight. 'I'm not going, and you are not going either. If you try, I'll call the landlady, and send for the doctor.'

'I didn't say I was going,' responded Mrs. Bertram carelessly, forgetting what had slipped from her a few moments before. 'That's your way, is it?—to say you won't do what your poor dying mother begs of you.'

'Mother—O I can't, mother,' said Pauline, half suffocated.

'It's duty and obedience, isn't it? But you'll have your will.' She laid herself back, pushed the papers under the pillow, and seemed to give the matter up. 'I'm too weak to get my way now, and you know that, and you like to take advantage of me.'

'O mother, how can you say so?' asked Pauline, distressed and indignant.

'Why, don't I see it? Isn't it plain? Here am I breaking my heart to get things put straight for you, and you going against me at every step. And I say it's wrong, and I don't care what anybody else says. You'll please to go out for a good walk, Pauline, and think it over, and maybe you'll come back in a different mood. It isn't what I expected of you. You just put on your things and go. I've nothing more to say to you till you've changed your mind.'

CHAPTER XL.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW'S VISIT.

THE raised voice spoke of anger, and when Pauline came beseechingly to the bedside she was sharply pushed away. Harsh words were hard to bear from the only being in the world who loved her, and Pauline broke into tears; but tears and protestations alike were vain. If she did not wish to walk, Mrs. Bertram chose her to do so. If she would not act according to her mother's desires, Mrs. Bertram would take care that she should not act according to her own desires. The gist of what was said to her came to this. She put on slowly at length her old cloak and bonnet.

'You can tell Mrs. Burley, as you pass, that I want a word with her. That loaf of bread she got us yesterday was four days old if it was an hour, and I am not going to be charged for a four days' stale as if it was a one-day stale. You needn't say all that, but tell her to come to me. And mind you think better of what you've said before you come back. I don't want you, if it's an hour or more.'

Pauline disappeared. Mrs. Bertram waited impatiently till all risk of her returning seemed at an end, and then slowly pulling herself up, she let her feet down to the ground. She was fearfully weak, and every movement caused pain, but her strength of determination carried her through what many another would have failed to accomplish. Leaning heavily on the bed she managed to get to the foot, where her clothes had lain folded on a box, since her arrival. The landlady, *entering a few* minutes later, found her seated

helplessly on a chair, half dressed, but with loose fastenings and untied strings, drooping forwards heavily.

'Eh! why, what's the matter? What are ye after now?'

The astonished voice roused Mrs. Bertram, and she sat up.

'I'm glad you've come. I do feel bad,' she said with a forced smile. 'That worst sort of pain is coming on again, I do believe, and I haven't had it three days past.'

'You are not fit to get up. Where's Pauline, Mrs. Smith?' For Mrs. Bertram had hitherto gone by this name in the household, and Pauline, in whom though pride was strong the love of truth was stronger still, had insisted on being known by her Christian name only.

'She's gone out, Mrs. Burley. I hope you'll do a good deed, and help a poor body. I'm sorely put to it. I'll give you a sixpence extra if you will, though it's ill I can afford it.'

'Sure enough I'll help you, and without the sixpence. Now you get right back into bed again,' said Mrs. Burley, who was one of the 'fat, fair and forty' kind, extremely untidy in appearance, with unkempt hair, slatternly dress, and soiled hands.

'I can't. I'm going out. I thought I could maybe walk, but I can't do that. Isn't there such a thing as a chair to be got here?'

'There's old Willis and his bath-chair just round the corner in High Street, and I make no doubt but he won't have a job at this time of day. Jack shall run and see in a trice. But, dear heart, you are not fit to be gadding about by yourself,' said the woman compassionately.

'My friends won't come to me, so I've got to go to them,' said Mrs. James Bertram. 'Just you send Jack, and come back. I can't dress nor get downstairs without a bit of help.'

'No more you can't. I'll tell Mimy to watch that the pot don't boil over. Dear me, I wonder, I do, at Pauline going

off and leaving you when you've got this on your hands. Poor thing! you look ready to drop, that you do.'

'You'll make haste, won't you now?' asked the other.

Mrs. Burley promised to be 'back in a trice,' and bustled away, her down-trodden slipper heels flopping after her. She returned quickly, according to promise, and with rough but not unkind hands carried on the dressing. Mrs. Bertram could do little more than keep her seat and endure.

'There, now you'll do,' said Mrs. Burley.

'There's my bonnet,' said Mrs. Bertram, and the bent and frayed thing of black imitation lace, with faded pink roses, was brought. 'It's shabby enough now, but it was pretty once, I can tell you. Mind you put it on straight.'

'You do look bad,' said Mrs. Burley. 'Why, you're as yellow—and your lips——'

'Look here,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'What do you think my name is?'

'Why, it's Smith. You told me that your own self.'

'Yes, I thought I would just at first. But I don't mean to go on hiding the truth. I'm not a Smith, I'm a Bertram. I'm Mrs. James Bertram, and Miss Bertram that lives in Bushby is my niece.'

The woman laughed rather uneasily. She did not believe it.

'You know you are not fit for this outing,' she said. 'It's no use to say you are. You're just wandering in the head, poor thing. Now you be sensible, do, and get into bed, and when Pauline comes back we can talk it over, you know.'

'I'm going straight off to Mrs. Bertram's, and I don't mean to get into bed. I've got business to see to first. If my sister-in-law don't care to come to me, I'll go to her. She's a grand lady in Bushby, I don't doubt. But it don't do pride any harm to be taken down a bit. I'm telling you truth, Mrs. Burley. Mrs. Bertram's husband was my husband's brother, and if I was to show you the papers, you'd see it plain enough.'

She stopped and groaned.

'There's the pain again. If only it would keep quiet till I've been.'

'You don't mean it's all true, really?' asked Mrs. Burley.

'I never spoke a truer word. Mind you, I don't say it'll please Mrs. Bertram. She's proud, isn't she? I've heard that. But she can't cast us off. I'm her sister-in-law, and Pauline's her own niece. When is that chair coming, Mrs. Burley?'

Mrs. Burley went to make inquiries, and came back with the news that the chair was at the door. The going downstairs was difficult past expression. Mrs. Bertram set her teeth rigidly, hung upon Mrs. Burley, and leant upon the rickety balusters, slipping rather than walking from step to step, a groan accompanying each movement. At the bottom she sank, sitting, on the lowest step, with a writhing movemen, as of positive agony. 'Water,' she whispered, and Mrs. Burley brought some.

'You'd best give in,' said Mrs. Burley.

'I'm not going to be hindered, now I've got so far.'

She found her feet, and could do no more. Mrs. Burley fairly dragged her along by main force, and deposited her in the chair.

'Where will you go, mum?' asked the chairman, looking perplexed at the unwonted character of his burden.

'Mrs. Bertram's—Elm Villa.'

She did not see Mrs. Burley's nodding farewell, and wondering gazers by the way were nothing to her. In truth, she was a strange-looking figure enough, with her shut eyes and yellow skin, pink roses and deathly pallor, to attract considerable attention. One old gentleman very nearly stopped the chair to ask if she needed help, but with a touch of true British shyness, he refrained from doing so. Thus it came to pass that she reached Elm Villa with no event on the road.

'Front door, mum?' asked the man dubiously.

'Yes.'

Her resolution was equal to the task of getting out by herself. He gave her some help in stumbling up the two or three steps under the porch, and rang the bell for her. The servant—Price, the parlour-maid, not Maria, the housemaid, who had been Muriel's evening companion—came quickly.

'Mrs. Bertram at home?'

'No, she is out.'

'Miss Bertram then?'

'No, they are out together. I can give them a message, if you like.'

'I must see Mrs. Bertram. When will they be back?'

'I don't know exactly. In a few minutes perhaps, or it may be half-an-hour.'

'I suppose I can wait?'

'O yes, you can wait.' Price looked sharply, to discover the manner of visitor. She was doubtful where to put the new-comer. The bath-chair seemed to point to the dining-room, the shabby dress to the hall.

'The chair can wait for me,' said Mrs. James Bertram.

She hardly knew what she was saying, and to stand longer had become well-nigh impossible. Stumbling to one of the hall chairs she dropped into it. That settled the matter. Price let her remain there, shut the front door, and disappeared.

Meantime Mrs. Bertram and Muriel were returning from a stroll. Muriel was laughingly declaring that the air and sunshine had given her some new ideas for the evening, while her eyes were full at sight of the lonely and forlorn Vicarage. She found it difficult to keep down all show of feeling, and after talking fast all along the lane she lingered in the garden. 'I will come directly,' she said. 'I want just to look at my ferns.'

'Don't stay about on the damp grass, that is all.'

Mrs. Bertram swept up the path alone, her long skirts trailing over the pebbles. The country fashion of front-door

on the latch had not yet forsaken Bushby. She went quietly in without ringing, and stopped short, electrified by the sight of a ghastly face, with hollow staring black eyes.

'You're Mrs. Bertram?' a voice said slowly.

'I am Mrs. Bertram,' was the dignified reply. 'If you have business, my daughter will undertake it.'

'My business is with you, Mrs. Bertram. Please to hear me.'

Mrs. Bertram was greatly disinclined. She disliked business, and disliked people who were ill, and this woman was plainly ill. Moreover the seeming rudeness of not rising offended her.

'I have not the pleasure of knowing who you are,' she said coldly. 'I am occupied just now. My daughter will be in immediately.'

'It's not your daughter I want, it's yourself. You'll excuse my sitting, for I'm ill and in pain. It's easy told who I am. I'm your sister-in-law, Mrs. Bertram. I'm another Bertram. My husband and your husband were brothers born.'

To say that Mrs. Bertram looked as if a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet would not be too strong an expression. She was absolutely stricken dumb. The face of Mrs. James Bertram was no whit more colourless than the face of Mrs. Arthur Bertram. For this, if true, cut to the very root of her happiness in life. She lived for the enjoyment of position and display. What was said of her and what was thought of her, constituted alike the chief pleasure and the chief pain of her existence. The one heavy trial of her life had been the knowledge, gained after marriage, of her husband's half-caste relations. Muriel's dark tell-tale looks had been for years a sore trouble. It was a trouble which of late years had fallen into the background. She had learnt to put it aside, comforted chiefly by the thought that the relationship was unknown in Claverton and Bushby. The fact had never yet oozed out.

And here she stood, facing a foreign sickly common-looking woman, with unmistakably something of the 'native' in her appearance, and found close kindred claimed. Those to whom social position is the first consideration in life, will realise how Mrs. Bertram's heart died within her. In truth, it really was a trial of no small magnitude, viewed even in its most reasonable aspect, though a calmer and loftier spirit than Mrs. Bertram's could more bravely have accepted it.

Mrs. James Bertram saw the impression made. She went on eagerly, in a voice broken with strong suffering: 'It's all true, and you know it's true. And I wrote to you three times—and I dare say you know that too, though you wouldn't heed me; that's the way with you. But you needn't trouble yourself overmuch about *me*, for I shan't trouble anybody long. Look here,' and she stretched out a skinny faded hand, 'not much flesh there, you see. I'm near death But there's my Pauline. She's a beauty, Mrs. Bertram—as pretty as ever your own daughter was when she was young. They're like enough to be sisters; and Pauline hasn't a friend in the world. Will you leave your own niece to starve when I am dead? Will you leave us both to starve now? I haven't three shillings in the world: and my rent has to be paid in two days. If you want proof, here it is. Look! Here's my husband's writing, telling it all, and signed and witnessed. I've got my marriage certificate too, and there's letters from your husband to my husband. Maybe you didn't know he wrote them, but he did. Arthur Bertram had a warm heart, though he was well-nigh lost to my husband after he married you. But you'll know his handwriting; there can't be a mistake about that. It hasn't been easy to find you, but I've found you at last, and Pauline and I are here in Bushby. I shall never leave it again, I expect. Pauline wouldn't be a disgrace to any household, Mrs. Bertram. She's a lady born. You'll be kind to her, now, won't you?'

So far, with increasing passion and rapidity, she poured

out what she had to say, excitement gaining the mastery over weakness. The last sentence dropped into a tone of entreaty. Mrs. Bertram stood like a statue, livid to the lips, her brows drawn and her eyes deadened with rage and dread. Not till this moment did she find voice to say hoarsely:

'Leave the house.'

'I haven't come here for nothing. I haven't spent my money and my strength in getting here, till I'm nigh penniless and dying, only to be treated as if I was a pariah. I'm your sister-in-law, Mrs. Bertram. Nothing can do that away, you know.'

'Will you leave the house, if you please?' Mrs. Bertram could hardly articulate. She had her father's temper in no small measure, and though commonly it was kept in check by habits of ladylike composure and indifference, it broke out fiercely at times. A slight foam gathered on her white lips. She walked to the door and opened it.

'That's no manner of use,' said Mrs. James Bertram. 'I don't mean to go, without you give me a promise of help. Do you want it to be known in Bushby that your sister-in-law has been let to starve, when a little money would have saved her? And what's to become of Pauline? You may have me dragged out, if you will, Mrs. Bertram, but if you're rough with me I'll maybe die in your hands. I haven't much life in me. How would you like that? I tell you, I must have help.'

'If you do not go at once, I will send for the police,' said Mrs. Bertram sternly and with thickening utterance. 'Muriel——'

Muriel came in and started visibly at the sight of the visitor and of her mother's face.

'Have that woman turned out! She is an impostor. I have nothing to say to her.'

'I'm not an impostor,' said Mrs. James Bertram. 'You dare to tell me that, knowing what's true! Hadn't your

nd a brother—and wasn't his name James? You
it, Mrs. Bertram. Look at these papers.'
ey were thrust into her hand. Mrs. Bertram let fall
icket as she would have let a reptile fall, and passed
tily into the drawing-room, shutting the door behind

ou have been very very wrong,' said Muriel, distressed
ale. 'Whether your tale is true or not, this is not the
act.'
I have justice, Miss Bertram; I'll have my Pauline
wledged.'
ou may insist if you will upon barren acknowledgment.
will do little good to you or her. Remember, you have
im whatever on my mother. If she chooses to help
any way, it is pure kindness on her part. You can-
emand a penny of us. You seem to have forgotten

haps she had. She looked a little taken aback.
houldn't think Mrs. Bertram would like the things as
be said, if she let her own niece starve.'
fear,' said Muriel calmly. 'People in England go
workhouse when they are in danger of starvation.'
y Pauline go to one of your wretched workhouses!
bliged to you, Miss Bertram. That's cousinly, isn't
wonder what would be said of you then.' She was
g with anger and weakness. 'And poor little Pauline
hinking you so kind——'
indness is not the question. I am talking now of
. I wish you simply to understand your position—
ou cannot claim help from us as your due. As for
ther people may say, I am perfectly indifferent so long
el myself to be in the right. As for the relationship,
ot yet acknowledge it.'
ell, it's a hard-heartedness that'll have its reward some
aid Mrs. James Bertram, with a groan. 'Will you
t the papers, Miss Bertram?'

'I cannot wait now. I must go and see after my mother. You may leave them, if you like.'

'And never see 'em again maybe. I'm up to a trick or two,' said Mrs. James Bertram scornfully, not seeing that in the open doorway there appeared at that moment the figure of Pauline.

'As you please,' said Muriel coldly. 'I should have visited you before, but I have been too unwell to leave the house. There is no haste, however. You must please to go now, and I will hear what you have to say another day.'

'I'm not going—for you nor anybody—till you've promised to help me.'

'Mother!' a voice gasped out behind Muriel, and she turned.

Pauline was crimson with intensity of shame. Muriel bent her head kindly though gravely.

'Good-morning, Pauline. I must ask you to take your mother away at once, for I can have no discussion now. Either this afternoon or to-morrow I hope to look in on you both.'

'Mother had no business to come. She's gone mad, I do believe. Miss Bertram, please forgive us.'

Mrs. James Bertram was almost at the end of her powers. She leant helplessly on one side against the hall-table, moaning with every breath, yet muttering, 'I'm not going. I don't mean to go.'

'Mother, you *shall* come,' said Pauline resolutely. 'I'll call the chairman, Miss Bertram.'

'Is that your mother's chair in the road?'

'She can't walk. The landlady told me she was gone in a chair. She sent me out of the way first, so I didn't know what she was after.'

Willis had retired outside the garden-gate, whence he was speedily summoned. Mrs. James Bertram made a feeble show of resistance still, but Muriel quietly desired the man to remove her, and Pauline energetically seconded the motion.

ı the two she was borne out, more dead than alive,
ɔed on the blue cushions. A wave of deep pity rose
el's heart. She beckoned to Pauline, and slipped
lings into her hand.
what your mother needs, Pauline. She looks very
ıd if you can stop this story from spreading further,
ıave proved the truth of it, I should be glad.'
ɗo everything I can. I'd do anything for you,' said
, with choked utterance. 'O I wish, I wish it wasn't

ɔus as Muriel was she paused a moment to look into
hed sensitive young face. 'You wish it?' she said.
, indeed, indeed I do, if it makes you unhappy. I
t help mother coming. I did my best to stop her.
she's getting weak in the head.'
l, good-bye,' said Muriel gravely. 'I will come and
both. I quite understand that it is not your fault.'
ne gave one grateful glance, and hurried after the
air. Muriel shut the front door, and went straight
rawing-room, expecting a painful scene. She guessed
is would be to her mother. 'O God, help me, keep
n,' she breathed, and with her hand upon the very
ıe paused to recollect herself.
no sound greeted her on entrance. Mrs. Bertram
he sofa in a deep swoon, cold, seemingly without life.
el had not dreamt of this. Shocked beyond telling,
terly blaming herself for having remained so long
he rushed to the bell, and rang such a peal that the
ervants appeared together. The cook was sent for
ɣce—Dr. Peters living at too great a distance to be
ıed on such an emergency—while Price flew for re-
es, and Maria helped Muriel to rub the chill hands.
thing after another was tried, and tried in vain.
Muriel nor her mother was given to fainting, and
s anxiety increased each moment. It seemed to her
: hands grew colder, the lips more blue. Cook came

back at length to say that Mr. Bryce was gone on his rounds, and could not be caught for two hours, when he would be at a certain house without fail. Meanwhile Mrs. Bryce, a thoughtful little woman, had sent a strong bottle of smelling-salts, supposing that Muriel might not have any at hand sufficiently powerful.

The salts proved effective. A gasp for breath was followed by movement, and Mrs. Bertram opened her eyes. Twice she relapsed into unconsciousness, but for a shorter time, and the deathly look was passing away as she struggled slowly back to sense.

CHAPTER XLI.

THREATENING THUNDER.

'WHAT are you going to wear this evening, Muriel?'

The unexpected question caused some surprise. Mrs. Bertram was seated in an arm-chair, a certain tremulous excitement of manner showing that she had received a severe shock that day. She seemed altogether so shaken and so intensely irritable, that Muriel had found the last few hours hard to get through. Mrs. Bertram had flatly refused to see Mr. Bryce—'a meddling inefficient young man,' she styled him. 'He would be sure to inquire into the cause of the faintness, and would spread gossip all over Bushby. Nothing was wrong with her except nervousness. She would not see any doctor.'

Muriel found resistance not to be thought of. All she could do was to follow the bent of her mother's varying will, minute by minute. Now Mrs. Bertram chose to walk up and down the room; now to lie down; now to make a pretence at working, with hands that shook persistently; now to discuss the morning visitor; now to declare that the very mention of her was unendurable. Muriel did her best to conform to each mood in turn. A brief pause was broken by the above question.

'You cannot go to the Manor this evening, mamma. I thought of sending an excuse.'

'Certainly I shall go. It will do me more good than moping here with nobody to speak to. What do you intend to wear?'

'Only my black silk. There is no need to make much of

an appearance for a teachers' tea-party. But indeed I think you would be better quietly at home.'

'I can't stand discussion about it. Argument makes me ill. Hand me my embroidery, Muriel. I am fearfully nervous this afternoon.'

Muriel brought it, and tried to awaken interest in a certain new pattern; but while talking, Mrs. Bertram, giving a violent start, burst into tears. She had done this several times already. The embroidery was pushed aside.

'Are you in pain?' asked her daughter anxiously.

'I don't know—no, not pain—only this feeling in my head. That woman—I don't know how to bear myself when I think of her. What shall we do? What can we do? The miserable disgrace—the shame——'

'It is no disgrace. We have done no wrong,' said Muriel. 'There is nothing to be ashamed of. Mamma, it is trying and disagreeable, but please don't think matters worse than they are. We shall get things straight again.'

'You can't. You don't half understand,' said Mrs. Bertram petulantly. 'It is the misery of *that* being known, after all these years. I can't bear it! I cannot live in Bushby. I shall go away somewhere—to France or Germany. O! what is that?'

'Only a ring at the front door. You are nervous, and everything startles you.'

'You are not going to see the woman to-day, Muriel. I will not be left in the house without you.'

'No, I will go to-morrow,' said Muriel.

'And mind you make her understand that we will have nothing to do with her—nothing! I will never see her again. If she will leave Bushby at once, without a word to anybody, I am quite willing to give her money. You can tell her so. I don't care how much—anything—if the whole thing is kept secret.'

Muriel did not like to suggest that her wisest course might be to see Mrs. James Bertram without the delay of another

night. She was reluctant to leave her mother in this state. Also she had a shrewd suspicion that the matter had already reached a stage beyond secrecy.

'I can't sit still, Muriel. Give me your arm.'

Mrs. Bertram walked to and fro, talking incessantly on the same subject.

'I don't see what else is to be done. Her object is to screw something out of us, of course. How are you to find out whether the tale is true? Papers, yes, but the woman may have stolen them. It may be all a mere get-up. I believe it is, for my part, and I always shall believe it. True or untrue, I will never have anything to do with them. I only wish we had somebody to consult about the best way of acting. If only John were here, or Arthur, or even Mr. Maxwell. I don't see why Mr. Maxwell's absurd fancy should keep him from helping us to decide in such a matter as this. Chesney told me once that Mr. Maxwell knew all about it. There is not a gentleman to appeal to, and I have been all my life so accustomed to be taken care of—and you don't seem to know in the least what to do. I don't know what will become of us. I almost think it will kill me. Muriel, what o'clock is it?'

'Four o'clock—no, a quarter past.'

'What time do we go to the Manor?'

'The note mentioned six or half past, just as we felt inclined. So I ordered the fly to be here about ten minutes before six.'

'I must dress soon after five. Perhaps if I lie down a little while it may do me good.'

'If you please, Miss Bertram, you are wanted,' said Price, entering.

'Who is it?' Mrs. Bertram asked.

'A young person, ma'am. She didn't give her name,' Price answered discreetly, in a tone of indifference.

'You will rest in your room while I go to see what she wants,' *said Muriel persuasively.* 'Come, mamma dear, and Price

shall call Maria to sit with you. I have one or two letters that ought to be written.'

Mrs. Bertram acquiesced, and Muriel felt some relief. She arranged her mother on the bed, and outside the door Price whispered, 'Maria saw the young person, Miss Bertram, and she says it is the daughter of the woman that frightened mistress so this morning. I couldn't have thought it, for she looks every bit a lady.'

Muriel went downstairs swiftly, and found Pauline in the dining-room, holding a bundle of papers.

'I won't hinder you,' she said timidly. 'But I found mother had not let you keep these papers, Miss Bertram, when you asked for them, so I have brought them straight away to you. I won't stop.'

'Wait a minute. How many papers are there?'

'I don't know. I didn't count.'

Muriel did so, and pronounced the number aloud.

'I will take care of them,' she said. 'Perhaps your mother shows more wisdom than you do, Pauline,—of the worldly sort.'

'No,' said Pauline. 'They are quite safe with you.'

'How do you know?'

Pauline gave a quick glance.

'I do know,' she said. 'I couldn't help being sure about you, Miss Bertram.'

Muriel was touched, more than she would show. Voice and look were soft as she said, 'You shall not find your trust misplaced. How is your mother now?'

'She is very bad. She does nothing but lie and moan.'

'Poor thing!' murmured Muriel, and she stood gazing out of the window in dreamy style.

'Mrs. Burley does not think mother can live long,' said Pauline, with downcast look.

'That is sad for you to hear.'

'Yes. I have nobody else belonging to me.' Pauline suddenly lifted her black eyes, full of the expression which had

more than once thrilled Muriel with an indescribable sense of sympathy and kinship. 'Mother does things I don't like, and she is angry with me often, but she *is* my mother. I shall have nobody when she dies.'

'You will not be friendless.'

Pauline shook her head. 'I have no friends,' she said.

'I cannot make promises yet, for I do not know how far I may go. But do you think you can trust me, without a direct promise, to see that you are not left alone in the world?'

Pauline's face changed as if a lightning-glow had flashed over it. 'O yes; O yes,' she said. 'I won't be so unhappy, now you have said that. Mother says, Miss Bertram, that I am a lady, but I think I should be quite happy if I might be your own maid, and do things for you. I would not take any wages, and I would eat very little, and no one need ever know my name. I would be Pauline to everybody.'

The outburst was curiously artless and unaffected, but the sweet refined manner struck Muriel as incongruous with any such suggestion. 'I should wish something better than that for you,' she said. 'I am very independent, and have no maid, Pauline. I must take the advice of friends, and think things over, and, meantime, you have to nurse your mother.'

'She is very bad to-day,' said Pauline, resuming her care-worn look. 'I don't know what to do when the worst of the pain comes on.'

'I hope to see her to-morrow. Does she show any change of mind yet—on religious matters?' Muriel had hesitated how to put the question.

'No,' said Pauline in a low voice.

'No anxiety about herself?'

'Sometimes. I don't know; I don't always know whether it is that or pain.'

'Does she let you read the Bible to her?'

'Sometimes,' repeated Pauline. 'But she never says anything about it.'

'Never mind; go on reading. Some little verse may be God's message to her. We can pray that it may. She perhaps thinks and feels more than we can tell.'

'I don't know,' said Pauline sorrowfully. 'She doesn't seem to feel much.'

'I do not think that is any certain proof. But you have to go to her now, and I must not keep you. We shall meet to-morrow.'

No touch of cousinliness came into the parting. Muriel had not yet allowed herself to view that idea as a reality. When, however, she sat down at the table, and slowly read through the documents brought by Pauline, conviction stole into her mind. She knew that the claim was truth. If she had before felt this, almost unknown to herself, she now saw it to be so, plainly, incontrovertibly. These papers would have proved the matter in a court of law. Muriel's calm common-sense could in nowise stand out against them.

Her father's letters to his brother James interested her much. There was a vein of sadness running through them, which brought moisture into Muriel's eyes. He had been wrong to hide from his intended the fact of his 'native' kinship, but with that Muriel had not to do. She did not feel it needful to pass judgment either upon her father's lack of straightforwardness, or upon her mother's resentful coldness, only she did feel that the story was a melancholy one. Arthur Bertram seemed for the most part to pass over his home troubles in silence. In his last letter, however, Muriel came upon a sentence which almost overcame her: 'We have two little ones now. Baby is a perfect snowflake —her mother's pride. Our eldest is a picture of you, James. I see you in every movement. Poor child! I do not know how it will work by-and-by, for her mother complains bitterly of her brown complexion, and sometimes can scarcely bear to look at her. Do not mention this to any-

body.' There were no letters of later date from Arthur Bertram, though he had lived a few years longer.

Muriel sat in profound thought, and then with sudden resolution fetched her writing-case. Two letters were speedily accomplished.

'MY DEAR MR. MAXWELL,

'We are in a good deal of trouble just now. May I write to you on my mother's behalf, even though she was not very cordial to you the other day? You know the little "skeleton" in our family history, which so tries her. A sister-in-law of my father's—a half-caste, very poor, and I should say very common-looking, with a daughter extremely unlike herself—has appeared in Bushby. So at least she claims to be, and I fear the claim is true. My mother is terribly upset, and she seems to long for masculine advice, instead of having only me to lean on. She said to-day, "If only John or Arthur were here, or even Mr. Maxwell." I did not ask her whether I should write. I have thought it best to do so on my own responsibility, leaving you to decide what to do. Perhaps you could write a few quieting words of advice to her. Would you mind? I can say no more, except that I am

'Ever yours,

'MURIEL.

'P.S. I am merely asking your advice. We are quite willing to help the poor woman herself, though I have tried to make her understand that she can legally demand nothing from us. I think this came to her as a new idea.'

Muriel's second letter was to her brother:

'MY DEAR ARTHUR,

'I am writing in haste to tell you that some relatives of ours have suddenly turned up in Bushby, not at all to

mamma's pleasure, or, I am afraid, to mine. There appears to be little doubt as to the truth of the tale.

'The woman—for a lady she is not, either English, "native," or Portuguese; and her nationality seems to be a compound of the three—professes to be the widow of my father's younger brother, James. I never heard of him before, did you? It has taken us greatly by surprise. I wish you were here, but that I know is not possible at this moment. Mrs. J. Bertram—shall I ever frame my lips to call her "aunt"?—is very ill, not far I think from death.

'Arthur, I did not half know the strength of my own pride before. I am disappointed in myself, to find this so real a trial, and wonder the less at mamma's extreme distress. Years ago, when I first heard of our "half-caste" relations, I took the matter very philosophically, and perhaps prided myself on doing so. Have I grown more worldly-spirited of late, I wonder?

'And yet it is not that part of the matter which I mind. I could take the gentle Pauline to heart and home easily enough—and I have often thought of the poor oppressed ladies and women of India, sisters of mine as they are in a nearer degree than that in which they are sistres of all who belong to the same wide empire, and sisters of all who are fellow-women. "Have we not all one Father?"—though they know Him not yet. I have thought of them many a time with loving interest, and I do not wish to forget the touch of their national blood flowing in my veins.

'You see I don't shrink from that fact. But when I stand beside this poor miserable repulsive vulgar woman, and hear her calling herself my "aunt," I confess pride does get the mastery, and my philosophy and Christianity do not seem equal to the occasion. It is wrong—wrong. It is not Christlike. I am praying for a better spirit, and you must pray for me.

'I wanted the relief of writing all this down, though I dare say you will smile at me in your quiet way. But I cannot

trouble John now with this sort of thing, so you will put up with my little effervescence. Write and tell me what you think of the matter.

'Your affectionate sister,

'MURIEL.'

Both being sent to the post, Muriel went upstairs to her mother, resolved to say nothing about the papers in her possession until the next day. She was amazed to find Mrs. Bertram dressed already for the evening. The glow in the cheeks added to her beauty, but did not add to Muriel's ease of mind. She seemed composed as usual, save for a nervous twitching of the muscles round her lips.

'Mamma, you look lovely!' was Muriel's exclamation.

Mrs. Bertram surveyed herself in the pier-glass. 'Yes, the effect is good. I could not lie still, so I thought I would dress early. What have you been doing all this time? It is a quarter past five.'

'So late? I did not know.'

'You will have to make haste. Mind you are ready.' Mrs. Bertram put her hand to her head, and murmured, 'I wish that feeling would go.'

'What feeling?'

'One cannot describe sensations. A kind of feeling as if I were here and somewhere else at the same time. I never had it before. I hope I shall not faint again.'

'You don't feel inclined to do so?' asked Muriel, with assumed cheerfulness.

'Not now. I thought it was coming on a little while ago. I felt so strange all at once, and Price was quite frightened, for my colour went completely, but my cheeks and head are burning again now. It is excitement, I suppose. One comfort is, no one will think me ill, or suppose that anything has happened.'

Muriel wondered how often the remark had been made that day. She wondered also whether anybody would be

possessed of so little penetration as not to think her mother looking ill.

'Mamma, I really think you had better stay at home to-night. You are not up to any fatigue. We could send an excuse even now——'

'On no account. I wish you would not persist in trying to get your own way. I shall certainly go. What do you suppose I have dressed for?'

'Then will you not sit quietly in the arm-chair while I get ready? I shall not be more than twenty minutes.'

Instead of which she was over forty. Mrs. Bertram walked in and out incessantly, and, every ribbon and button—metaphorically speaking—had to undergo critical discussion. She was barely ready when the fly was announced, and Mrs. Bertram had been chafing for ten minutes at the prospect of possible delay.

Arriving at Claverton Manor, they found everybody there before them. Tea was over, and the teachers for whose benefit the treat had been arranged were scattered through hall, drawing-room, library and garden, admiring flowers or playing at croquet and bagatelle. Many friends were present, helping to amuse and being themselves amused.

Ernest Wentworth came into the hall to welcome the two latest comers. He was very grateful for their company, and extremely courteous, escorting Mrs. Bertram to the seat of honour in the drawing-room, and lingering about Muriel with evident desire for conversation. She made herself as little interesting as she could well do, but possibly she would have attracted him less in one of her piquant and brilliant moods, than in this quiet and pensive gravity. He was sure she was suffering greatly from the associations belonging to her old home, while in reality the day's events had left little room in her mind for the indulgence of recollections.

'Mrs. Bertram is not looking well this evening,' he said *solici*tously.

'She has not been herself to-day, thank you.'

'Perhaps she is sensitive to changes of weather. It is very oppressive, wonderfully so for autumn. I fancy there is a storm brewing. The air feels "thundery."'

'I do not know that she is sensitive to the approach of a storm. It affects her nerves a good deal when it actually does come.'

'Rachel is rather timid. I should not think you were, Miss Bertram.'

'If two people live together, and one is nervous, the other must needs act the courageous rôle.'

'Putting self aside,—yes, I understand,' he said, with admiration.

'No, I did not mean that exactly. I am not timid. How beautiful your flowers are looking.'

CHAPTER XLII.

A FALLEN TREE.

MURIEL regretted her remark, for he went hastily across the room, entered the open door of the conservatory, and brought back two or three cuttings of rare rich crimson geranium, with heliotrope, maiden-hair, and a pure white blossom, unknown to her by name. They were put into her hand so frankly that her most simple action was to accept them; but she was sorry. 'Thank you. What a pity to gather the poor things! They will so soon fade,' she said.

'O no. You are fond of flowers?'

'Very.' Nevertheless she allowed them to lie carelessly on her knee.

'So am I. Rachel laughs at me a little sometimes, but after all she enjoys them no less herself. I am not much of a botanist, but it is a delight to watch their growth and habits, and to feel one's way into their beauty. Don't you think, Miss Bertram, that one learns something of God through His flowers?'

'I don't feel any doubt about the possibility,' she said.

'A thunder-storm—a mountain—an ocean—may speak more plainly as to His power. But in flowers one seems to see such a love of beauty for beauty's sake—such a kingly profusion in the way they are flung broadcast over the earth.'

'Beauty for beauty's sake is apt to fall into the shade, these utilitarian days,' said Muriel. 'But I think power is as much shown in perfection of finish, as in display of strength. *Look* at the exquisite veining that runs through this petal.'

She held up the flower towards the light, forgetting to be cold as she grew interested. 'And the colouring and consistency—so rich and so frail.'

'"Even Solomon—in all his glory"'—said Ernest. 'Yes, we are very proud of our poor imitations of nature, but after all, our finest finish is rough child's play compared with God's finish.'

'I feel inclined to throw aside flower-painting for ever while I am looking at this,' said Muriel, studying the flower still. 'Copy it! Why, we are hardly fit to handle flowers. I can't even press my finger upon this petal without blurring its beauty.'

She woke up presently to the fact that she was making herself too pleasant, and tried to talk less, but Ernest proved to be not easily checked. Twice he was called off, and twice came back to her side. Muriel rose then, and said, 'I am going to find your sister. We hardly know one another yet.'

Ernest was charmed at the implied wish for a better acquaintance, and brought the two together with promptitude, lingering also himself, which Muriel did not want. Some one presently called him off. Muriel found it not quite easy to get on with Rachel Wentworth. There was a certain bluntness, even hardness, of manner which chilled her. Systematic thawing was her only resource. She set quietly to work to make herself liked, by getting below the surface of the other's nature, and in the course of twenty minutes the two were in earnest conversation. Rachel was fascinated,—for Muriel possessed power of fascination when she chose to exert it. She took her visitor into the conservatory to look at some flowers, and while there broke in abruptly upon Muriel's enjoyment of a magnificent fern with the remark,—

'I am glad Ernest called me. I shall feel that I know you a little better now.'

'And I you,' said Muriel, raising her eyes to Rachel's *plain and honest face.*

'Don't you always feel as if we were interlopers in your old home?'

'O no—how could I? My mother and I are always thankful that the dear place fell into such hands.'

'Thank you. But, indeed, I thought Ernest hardly kind to ask you here. All must seem so changed.'

'One cannot get through this life without some uprootings.'

'No,—still they are painful,' remarked Rachel.

'More so than one always likes to acknowledge,' said Muriel rather sadly. Then, determined not to lose this opportunity of saying what she had in her mind, she added, 'You made acquaintance with an old friend of ours the other day—Mr. Maxwell.'

'Your tutor?' said Rachel.

'And friend.'

'A tutor of long standing grows into a friend. Your brother's tutor, was he not?'

'Mine too virtually. I learnt more from him than from anybody else.'

'I should think him a clever man.'

'I never knew any one more thoroughly intellectual,' said Muriel, her colour brightening. 'He is a contrast to ordinary men.'

'Ernest liked him extremely. I thought him perhaps a little singular, but he and Ernest seemed exactly to suit.'

'He is very good too,' said Muriel slowly. 'I don't mean a mere ordinary "good" man, which often implies no more than "kind-hearted." I never saw any one so spend his life in God's service, so live in God's presence. I think he would be willing to bear any trouble, if he felt it were God's will.'

Rachel began to understand. 'I suppose he paid you a long visit lately,' she said.

'No,' replied Muriel.

'*I* thought he would. He seemed very anxious to see you *and* your mother.'

'He would have been glad to stay, if—' and she paused. 'But my mother——'

'Perhaps Mrs. Bertram does not quite appreciate him.'

'As a tutor she does. She would not like him as——'

Muriel hesitated again, but her varying expression was not difficult to read. Rachel stood looking at her gravely.

'I do not mind telling you,' said Muriel in a low voice, 'only please don't let it go farther than yourself—yourselves. Mr. Maxwell wished—if my mother had been willing—he and I should have been engaged.'

'And she was not willing?'

'No.'

'That must be a trial to you,—unless indeed—but you say it would have taken place, if she had been willing. Yes, I see. Is it all over now?'

'Till she consents. We can wait,' said Muriel. 'My mother may change her mind some day, when she finds that nothing else is possible for me.'

'Nothing else?' repeated Rachel.

'I would not do this without her consent, but I can never care for anybody else.'

'You have known him so long.'

'Twenty years.'

'And he has wished it—ever since? Do you mind my asking,' inquired Rachel.

'No, I don't mind. I was a child then of course, but he was always the best friend I had. He found out what he felt more than twelve years ago.'

'And you——?'

'I did not let myself know it till he came this time, but it has been so for years. It can never be different, and I do not want it to be. I only want to be kept from fighting after my own way.'

Rachel took Muriel's hand between both hers, and pressed it.

'*My dear,' she said,* 'I quite understand. Your con-

fidence is safe with us, and I understand your reason for telling me. I think it kind—right—good of you.' In a low voice she could not help murmuring, 'Poor Ernest.'

'There is certainly a storm brewing,' said Muriel. 'What a bank of black clouds!—and did you hear how the wind moaned just now?'

The subject was dropped, and not resumed, for Muriel had said all that was needful. The attention of people in general began to be fixed on the weather. It had been a heavy still July-like day, unwonted at this season. Presently a distant rumble of thunder was followed by a tempestuous rush of wind, startling in its suddenness. Lights were in the rooms, and croquet-players had been driven indoors long before by the increasing dusk, but through the unblinded windows the trees could be seen bowing before the gale, tossing their tall heads, while their branches swayed and strained fiercely, as if struggling to be free. The first gust lessened, only to be followed by another. Ernest went into the conservatory and shut an open pane of glass. 'We are going to have a storm,' he said, coming back. 'It is a good thing we do not break up for an hour more.'

Mrs. Bertram looked nervous, and Muriel was somewhat afraid for her of further excitement after the morning's agitating discovery. Rumble after rumble sounded, and one or two young ladies indulged in faint shrieks, half laughing, half serious, at some slight flashes. The gale increased, till it was difficult to distinguish the muttering thunder from the roar of the wind. 'Singular at this time of year; one does not look for thunder close upon November,' one gentleman said, and another added, 'Too severe to last long.' Then there was a vivid flash, looking weird in the dark garden, and overpowering the yellower light of the chandeliers. Mrs. Bertram never screamed, but she was in a visible tremor.

'We shall have to turn our house into an hotel for the night, if this continues,' Ernest remarked smilingly to Muriel. 'Your carriage would be in danger of an overturn.'

'Do you think so? I fancy I have driven in as strong a wind.'

He looked doubtful, and when she went nearer the window to make a fresh inspection she felt the same. The branch of a tree came down with a crash upon the pathway as she gazed. 'There will be an immense amount of damage done if this lasts through the night,' Mr. Fielding said beside her. '"Stormy wind fulfilling His word," Miss Bertram.'

'O—see!' Muriel exclaimed, as a silver stream rushed almost from the horizon to the zenith. 'What a flash!'

'Your mother seems a good deal disturbed.'

'She is not very well to-day.'

'You are not afraid?' said Mr. Fielding, and Ernest Wentworth, close at hand once more, answered for her: 'Miss Bertram does not know what fear is.'

'I can't pretend that. But I don't feel frightened in a thunder-storm. It does not affect my nervous system as with some people, and the *other* fear seems to me impossible,' she said.

'Which other?'

Both asked the question. Muriel looked at Mr. Fielding. 'Weapons in a Father's hand cannot terrify his child.'

Mr. Fielding smiled, well-pleased. 'But how if the Father were a physician, and had to put his child to pain?'

'One can imagine such a case,' said Muriel. She moved involuntarily back at another flash. 'Don't think me more courageous than I am. I have an intense delight in beauty, and the grandeur of a storm fascinates me. But to be struck by lightning would be very terrible,—if it were to cause a lifetime of suffering or blindness after. I should not think it right to put myself needlessly in danger.'

'I wonder if that is the "glittering spear" spoken of in Habakkuk,' said Ernest, as a blue forked radiance flashed to and fro on the black cloud-surface.

'Well,' said Mr. Fielding musingly; 'if the "stormy wind fulfils His word," it ceases at His word also. "He commandeth even the winds and waters, and they obey Him."'

'That thought gives one such a feeling of safety,' said Muriel. Then she moved nearer her mother, anxious to find how she was without showing any troublesome amount of solicitude.

Conversation different in kind was going on here. Mrs. Bertram, pale and fatigued, with a red spot on either cheek, was enduring the chit-chat of a young lawyer, by name Mr. Garnet, who, being at his home in Bushby for a few weeks, had been persuaded to bring his microscope as a contribution to the entertainment. He was a recent acquaintance of the Bertrams, good-natured but rather shallow. Pulling at his moustache, and shifting perpetually from one foot to the other, he endeavoured to make himself agreeable to the former lady of Claverton Manor.

'By-the-bye, Mrs. Bertram,' exclaimed the hearty voice of Dr. Peters, 'what is this about your newly-arrived niece? Mr. Garnet is full of the subject. He describes her as a perfect sylph, a gazelle, and I know not what besides. Just come from India, I hear. You have seen her, Garnet?'

'I—a—had that pleasure. She was pointed out to me,' hesitated the young man, his fair reddish skin blushing scarlet. 'I—a—thought her lovely,—did, positively. Magnificent eyes—in fact—pardon me—very much Miss Bertram's style.' He spoke to Mrs. Bertram, not seeing Muriel near. 'Could detect the relationship at a glance. Just off board ship, I suppose. Pity poor folks—on first arrival, costume always in an unenviable condition.'

'Is she staying with you, Mrs. Bertram?' asked Dr. Peters of the stunned lady. 'You must bring the little paragon to us for a visit some day. Mr. Garnet has been raving to my wife for half an hour, and declares that all Bushby is ringing with admiration of the young lady. I do not know how many of his acquaintance "all Bushby" may imply. By-

the-bye, I did not know you had a sister still in India. Has she returned too?'

'Muriel, my dear, you will be quite jealous of such a lovely young rival,' said Mrs. Fielding. 'Is it true that she has never left India till now? That is surely very unusual. The climate is generally found so dangerous for all English children after a certain age.'

Muriel hardly heard the words, she was so painfully occupied in watching her mother. Mrs. Bertram poured a little scent on her lace pocket-handkerchief, and looked up carelessly at the two gentlemen, inquiring: 'Where can you possibly have heard such an absurd report?'

'Then it is not true?'

'I have no sister. No visitors are staying with us. I have seen no particularly pretty girls lately. Bushby is famous for reports.'

'Very odd,' said the young man. 'I was informed as a matter of certainty that she was another Miss Bertram. Curious instance of the misleading power of imagination. I positively believed I detected a likeness. Really, gossip is allowed to go too far.'

'There has been a woman of that name in the place lately, —no relation,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'That is no doubt how the report has arisen. A person better avoided.'

Mrs. Bertram's scent-bottle rolled to the floor, as these words dropped slowly from her lips. Muriel, under pain and constraint, dreading anything further, really believed her mother hardly knew what she was saying. Dr. Peters looked attentively at Mrs. Bertram, noting something unusual about her. She received the scent-bottle from Mr. Garnet, and rose. 'Thanks,' she said. 'How oppressive the air of this room is.'

'We could endure an open window,' muttered the young lawyer.

'I shall try the effect of a change to the conservatory. I have not been there—since—it was ours——'

The hesitation of speech might have passed for a painful recollection of those days. Muriel alone saw that collectedness and power to speak were failing. Mrs. Bertram moved with a languidly indifferent step to the conservatory, and entered alone. Others, respecting the fact to which she had just alluded, held aloof.

'My mother is not very prudent. She will be much exposed to the storm there,' Muriel said aloud, and, disregarding a remark of Mrs. Fielding—'I wonder who the pretty young stranger really is, then,'—she too went inside the glass door. At the word 'Mamma,' Mrs. Bertram turned a face of such blank bitter despair as Muriel had never before seen.

'Go, for pity's sake go, Muriel. Don't draw more attention.'

The breathed utterance went no farther than to her ears. Muriel drew back a few steps, and forced herself to enter into conversation with an acquaintance. She could see her mother's figure, motionless as a statue, apparently bending over some flowers, but she dared not watch too closely for fear of causing remarks.

As Mrs. Bertram stood there, a redoubled gust of wind rushed shrieking round the house, and at the same moment came a vivid flash, a rattling peal, a heavy crash as of some falling body, and the sound of breaking woodwork, with glass dropping in a shower. Shrieks from behind were nothing to Muriel. She was at the door in an instant, but Ernest Wentworth sprang ahead, and would have held her back.

'Wait—stop, Miss Bertram; it is not safe for you. Let me see.'

A black figure lay prostrate beneath shattered flower-pots, scattered mould, and general *débris*, but mercifully not under the slender tree which had been blown down upon the conservatory, smashing framework, glass, and tiers of plants, in one dire confusion. The wind swirled madly in through the broken roof, and the whole structure shook as if in danger

of collapsing. No efforts of Ernest could keep Muriel from the spot where her mother lay senseless.

'We must be quick. Another tree may be blown down,' he said, and with the help of two or three more gentlemen Mrs. Bertram was carried to the shelter of the drawing-room, and laid upon the sofa. Muriel had not even exclaimed, though blood was upon the white face, and her own was scarcely less pale. The room had to be rapidly cleared of needless spectators, only Rachel and Mrs. Fielding remaining, besides Muriel and Dr. Peters.

A few minutes of deep anxiety were followed by an assurance from the doctor that the fallen tree had not touched Mrs. Bertram. Her only apparent injuries were a few superficial cuts and bruises from glass and flower-pots, unimportant though painful. But the swoon lasted long, and remedy after remedy was applied in vain. Dr. Peters began to look seriously uneasy. Rachel said to him in a low voice, 'Can it have been the lightning?'

'I hope not. I trust not. Has your mother ever fainted like this before?'

'Never, till to-day.' She hesitated, and then made up her mind that, say what Mrs. Bertram might, the fact ought not to be hidden. 'This morning, Dr. Peters.'

He seemed greatly surprised, and inquired particulars.

'She has not been well, and I did my best to keep her from coming to-night. She has complained of an uncomfortable feeling in her head, and this afternoon she was faint a second time. I fancied a little while ago that she hardly knew what she was saying.'

'Her manner struck me as singular.'

'The fall of the tree may have startled her, and brought it on again,' said Mrs. Fielding.

Dr. Peters looked thoughtful. 'The head a little lower,' he said. 'So—and the salts—thank you. You do not know any distinct cause for the morning's attack, Miss Bertram?'

'*Yes. She was worried*—alarmed——'

'In what way?'

'I cannot give you particulars. She heard some news unexpectedly, which came as a shock. I think she has suffered from it ever since. She was a long time insensible.'

Dr. Peters asked no more questions. At last she roused to a half sort of consciousness, coming partly to, and sinking off again, more than once, before sufficiently recovered to mutter, 'Home! are we home?'

'We are at the Manor, mamma,' said Muriel, bending nearer. 'Are you a little better now?'

'O I don't know. I feel very ill. What has happened?'

'You were startled. A tree fell in the conservatory,' said Muriel, desirous to turn her mind from the real trouble, while the others thought her imprudent to say so much.

'Tree!' She shut her eyes. 'Muriel, my head has that strange feeling. I must go home. Who are all these people?'

'Don't heed her. She is wandering,' Dr. Peters whispered.

'I must go home,' was however repeated again and again, and when it received no answer she opened her eyes wide, and stared at each in turn. 'Muriel—I must—Muriel, I must go home,' she said, catching at her daughter's dress. 'All these people round—so uncomfortable—send them away. I want to sleep, and I can't sleep here. I am going home.'

'Yes, yes, all in good time,' Dr. Peters said soothingly, with a hand on her shoulder, as she tried to rise. 'Presently, presently. We must have you better first.'

'I shall never be better here. I am going to be ill. I am going home. Is that Dr. Peters? Order my carriage, if you please.'

She grew imperious at resistance and excited at delay. Dr. Peters found there was no help for it. A short delay might have been safer, but after all if illness were threatening she would be best in her own house. The thunder and lightning had ceased, and the force of the wind had much lessened. His decision came at length to 'The sooner the better.'

ıe Manor carriage was lent, as being more easy than any fly. Mrs. Bertram could not stand, but she was carried nd placed upon cushions, with her feet raised. Muriel eside her, and Dr. Peters opposite Muriel, for he would ɛt the two go alone. Mrs. Bertram's faint protestations unheeded, and Muriel felt grateful indeed for his ːnce.

ıchel's parting good-bye to Muriel was full of kindness ɜympathy. Ernest noticed this with real pleasure, and ıited somewhat impatiently thereafter for all his guests gone. The remaining half-hour seemed to him both and dull; but at length the last umbrella had disared from the stand, and Ernest stood alone with his , in the disordered drawing-room.

Vell, Rachel,' he said. 'You appreciate her now?'

CHAPTER XLIII.

A LIFE ENDED.

'APPRECIATE whom?' asked Rachel.

'I thought you would understand. Don't you know Miss Bertram better than before this evening?' He spoke anxiously, playing with a pen-knife.

'I like her,' said Rachel calmly, looking at the fireplace, for she could not look at Ernest.

'Is that all? I thought from your manner that you had really taken a fancy to her.'.

'Taking fancies is not my way. But I do appreciate her better—and there seems to me great sweetness and strength of character. So much high principle too.'

'Ah, you are beginning to know her a little.'

Rachel brought out her tidings bluntly, after her accustomed fashion: 'Mr. Maxwell will be a happy man, when he has her.'

'Mr. Maxwell! You are dreaming. What Mr. Maxwell?'

'The one that we know—the tutor. Miss Bertram told me herself about him, only she does not wish it to go beyond ourselves. He has loved her for years, and it is only Mrs. Bertram's objections which prevent their being engaged now.'

'But—but you don't know whether she cares for him——'

'Yes, she told me plainly so. They are waiting, in hopes that Mrs. Bertram may change. She spoke very quietly, *but* anything else is evidently impossible to her.'

'You don't know—you may be mistaken. That once

given up—why, he is only—he is—he is old enough to be her father.'

'It is a twenty years' friendship. She told me plainly, that though she would not marry him without her mother's consent, she would never marry anybody else. I liked her for her frankness, under the circumstances.'

'Good-night, Rachel.'

'You won't let this trouble you too much, will you Ernest?'

'Good-night. You had better go to bed.'

And he was gone. She heard the study-door shut heavily. But Rachel knew her brother, and instead of going to bed she waited. The wrecked conservatory, showing through the uninjured glass door, had a melancholy look, and albeit the storm was at an end, the wind still sighed round the house in a style suggestive of depression. Rachel was not given to deep musings, or she had here a fitting opportunity; but she dearly loved her brother, and could not bear him to be grieved. So she cried for him a little, and then scolded herself for having the least possible sense of satisfaction in the knowledge that at present no rival was likely to dispute her position with Ernest. What would life have been to her without him? And what would life be to him without Muriel? That was a grave question. For if our lives are to be lived to God and not to ourselves, then the loss of this, that, or the other, out of our lives, ought not to make them even in seeming 'worth nothing' to us. Rachel felt this in an undefined sort of way, and wished that Ernest might feel it too.

Then the study-door opened, and Ernest came back with a quick step, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

'Rachie, was I ill-tempered to you?' he said in a low voice, and while she would not look in his face, she knew that, man though he was, he had passed through a sharp breeze of distressful weeping. The sorrow of some men—and they by no means as a rule the less manly among men, but rather the reverse—*breaks* out as naturally in tears as a woman's

sorrow, only not so easily. Their tears are the rain of winter gales, not of summer showers.

'Poor boy,' she said to herself, and he turned away his head.

'It is hard to give up that hope. There is no one in the world like her.'

'Think of poor Mr. Maxwell, and his twenty years!'

'Ah, it is easy for you. But I can't talk about it. Pray for me, pray that I may bear disappointment as a Christian should,' he said in a smothered voice, hastily kissing her forehead. 'Good-night, dear old Rachie. We shall have to be maid and bachelor together, as we used to say we would. Pray for me, Rachie,—you don't know how hard it is. But you shall see me braver to-morrow.' And so she did.

That same morrow found Mrs. Bertram seriously ill. Dr. Peters had not left the house all night. Fever had set in, and the pulse was high, the speech wandering. Though able still to recognise those who were with her, and to answer a question rationally, she seemed to have lost all self-control, and talked continually on the subject of the James Bertrams, no matter who was with her.

Even had Muriel possessed the slightest hope of suppressing the truth about the relationship—and she had grave doubts about the rightfulness of attempting to do so—it would now have become impossible. Before the servants and before Dr. Peters, no less than before herself, the weary round of talk went on. Muriel was obliged to explain the state of affairs to Dr. Peters, mentioning also her mother's dislike to the 'half-caste' connection being known, and leaving him to tell what he chose to others. She had no doubt the whole tale was already abroad, with interesting additions, though secure of kind reticence on his part. He made no allusion to Mrs. Bertram's denial of the truth at the Manor. She hoped he would ascribe it to a wandering brain; and indeed she was half disposed herself to lay it in measure to that score.

Muriel had seen delirium before, but anything so painful

as these ravings had never come in her way. The excitement rarely stilled. If she could persuade her mother to lie quiet for ten minutes, there was sure to come an agonised start, followed by a terrified gaze. 'That woman, Muriel, that woman!' was the cry of the parched lips. 'Don't you see? Send her away; she drives me wild. Send her away, Muriel. She is *not* my sister-in-law. I will never consent—never. It is all a sham, an intrigue, a mere cheat. It would lower us. What are you about? Why don't you settle the matter? Something must be done. O, don't ask me. I can't think: I don't know what I am saying while that creature is staring at me. Dying! why she may die in the hall. Keep her off. Muriel! Muriel! she is going to to touch me!' and Mrs. Bertram's shriek would ring through the house. 'Get a policeman—why don't you—why don't you, Muriel? Why doesn't John come, or Mr. Maxwell, or somebody? It is horrible to be alone like this, with only that wretched creature standing there. She means to ruin me; and she can—she knows she can!'

'Mamma, you are not alone. Look, dearest, I am here, and nobody else,' Muriel would say, laying her hand on her mother's. 'Look! you know me.'

'No; don't talk so. Always arguing and trying to get your own way. What has become of that woman? It might be a scandal—I mean—I mean the laughing-stock—gossip of the neighbourhood. I could not endure it. Nobody need know; don't tell. Muriel, don't tell! I should go out of my mind if you did. Send them off from Bushby—the next train, you know. Never let me hear the name again. James Bertram; yes, there was a James Bertram, but I never saw him. O, this feeling in my head! I wish it would go. Everything is so fearfully hot. I can't think why you will keep every window shut. Muriel! Muriel! why don't you send her away?'

And so it went on, hour after hour, only getting worse, as the first day sped.

Towards five o'clock in the afternoon, Muriel was summoned downstairs. Dr. Peters, being in the bedroom, told her to send Price, and not to hurry herself, for half-an-hour's change would do her good. Muriel did not at first mean to take advantage of the permission, till she found her hand grasped by Montgomery Maxwell.

'O how kind!' was all she could say.

'Your mother is ill, the servant tells me. I am grieved, Muriel; very much grieved. Nothing severe, I trust. What is the cause?'

Muriel explained how matters stood, and he listened with deep interest.

'Poor Mrs. Bertram! sad—how sad! Perhaps she will be better to-morrow. And you sat up with her all last night, Muriel? Your eyes show it.'

'We have a regular night-nurse coming in an hour. I shall sleep in the next room, ready to be called if wanted. Dr. Peters insisted on my having help. She may be ill for days, he says.'

'And all owing to yesterday's unfortunate events?'

'Yes—the shock to the nervous system. I do think the woman behaved very very wrongly,' said Muriel passionately. 'I feel as if I hardly could forgive her. She may have killed my mother. Why could she not wait?'

'She has been very wrong—very mistaken. But she did not realise what it would be to Mrs. Bertram. She could not know. We must try to look at the matter from her side as well as ours. She is not a person of delicate feeling, and she was ill, suffering, bent on finding a home for her child.'

'Ah, if I had your charitable spirit!' said Muriel, sighing deeply. 'But it is dreadful to think of what may come. And mamma—mamma is not ready.'

She hid her face in her hands.

'The illness may be sent for the very purpose—to make *her* ready, to draw her to the foot of the Cross. God draws *so* sometimes—often, I think. Pray, and trust Him, Muriel.

We don't know what is best. Maybe she needed some sharp sorrow which should strike home, to rid her of her love of this world. Don't think me harsh. She would say herself that she loved it.'

'O, I wish I could be less sure that it is so. But she thinks of nothing now except Mrs. James Bertram. Her mind seems to have no room for any other idea.'

'What can I do for you?' he asked presently. 'I have left the boys in charge of my housekeeper, a most worthy dependable person. I shall sleep two nights at the hotel, and afterwards come backwards and forwards as often as seems needful. What can I do for you?'

'Would you go and see Mrs. James Bertram?' she said, after a pause. 'I cannot leave my mother.'

'I had thought of that. It will not be my first visit. I saw her in London.'

Muriel's surprise drew the story from him.

'And you, too, thought Pauline so like me,' she said.

'Wonderfully like. I could not but see the resemblance. However, knowing what Mrs. Bertram's feelings would be, I declined to mention where you were living. I thought it wisest. How they found out after all I do not know. When I returned to London I found them gone from their lodgings. It troubled me a good deal. I wished I had taken stronger measures to secure their being looked after. But I will go now gladly for you.'

'Tell Mrs. James Bertram, please, how ill my mother is. I think you had better mention that we are willing to help, though I shall be able to do less now than I could have done.'

'I see—yes, yes, I see. This illness will be a heavy expense.'

'I think we can spare enough to keep them going,' said Muriel. 'I only wished you to mention that, for fear she should expect an unlimited amount of help. I would not trouble you with money matters, but I cannot go, and I must *not leave them to starve.*'

'It is easily managed: no trouble, I assure you. Give me what you like, and I will be your almoner. I will supply small sums to the young lady as need arises. Don't give me much. I can come to you for more.'

Muriel put three sovereigns into his hand, and would take none back, though he protested. She had a shrewd suspicion that he would not soon ask her for a fresh supply, and determined to keep watch. Meantime it seemed the only way in which she could act. For her mother's sake she could not resolve to let her aunt be known as a pauper.

'I wish they would go to rather more respectable lodgings,' she said, 'and be better dressed. Pauline has quite the look of a lady, only she is so shabby. Dr. Peters tells me this afternoon that all kinds of tales about our new-found relatives are flying about Bushby, but it is not yet known where they are staying. I think we should do all we can to prevent remarks of a kind that would try mamma. I mean it would try mamma by-and-by, to know of them. Very few people are likely to see Mrs. James Bertram, but people will know where they live, and Pauline is sure to be noticed.'

'True—true,' said Mr. Maxwell thoughtfully. 'I will see what can be done. You may trust me. And it would be as well to let it be known that the mother has spent very little of her life in England, and is not accustomed to English ways. That is simple truth; as also that she is partly of Portuguese extraction, and was brought up at the Cape. People must have something to satisfy their curiosity—yes, undoubtedly. We must respect your poor mother's feelings by not mentioning the little matter of the half-caste descent. But indeed I hear of nothing except strong sympathy for you both. Three friends I met on my way from the station, —the same in every case. I kept my counsel and said nothing, not knowing what you would wish. I quite understand now. I shall have opportunities in the hotel to check exaggerated reports. But indeed it will be only a nine days' wonder—nothing more. What does it matter?'

'Nothing to you and me—only to mamma.'

'Ah, to be sure—yes. I am forgetting that.'

He had enough in hand to keep him busy for some hours. Quiet, absent man that he was ordinarily, he could be active and prompt on occasions, more especially such occasions as concerned Muriel.

Before the close of the following day Mrs. James Bertram and her daughter found themselves in very different quarters from the close little street behind the post-office. There was a row of neat houses not far off, looking upon a meadow, with a small bay-windowed sitting-room and adjoining bedroom on the ground-floor of each. Finding in one of these the ground-floor apartments 'to let,' Mr. Maxwell seized upon them, without much troubling himself about the terms.

Moving was a matter of some difficulty, for Mrs. James Bertram's excursion in the bath-chair had increased her illness not a little. This time, however, no exertion on her part was called for. Lifted into the fly, and lifted out of it again, she had but to submit.

And submit she did, without comment, and without apparent gratitude. A strange variation of mood had come over the sick woman. It had been deepening ever since her return from Elm Villa, and when Mr. Maxwell told her of Mrs. Bertram's severe illness, with a gentle word of reproach for the cause, she took refuge in almost absolute silence. Whether it were silence of sullenness or silence of remorse, no one could tell. Possibly it sprang from a mixture of the two. She said nothing when placed in her new and pleasant abode. She uttered no word of pleasure at the comforts around her. Pauline had to thank Mr. Maxwell for herself and her mother too, and she did it so prettily that Montgomery scarcely noticed the omission on the part of Mrs. Bertram.

His next move was to take Pauline with him through Bushby, for the purpose of supplying her with 'correct attire,' as he told her. Maxwell was helplessly ignorant on

the subject of a lady's needs, but he bethought himself of Muriel, and remembered that she certainly did wear—a bonnet—yes, and some sort of shawl or jacket—yes, and a dress, besides gloves and boots. Also he knew Muriel did not always appear in precisely the same dress. So he took Pauline to the principal linen-draper's, explaining to her that she must choose for herself. The startled Pauline was almost inclined to resist.

'My dear, it is quite right,' he said. 'It is Miss Bertram's wish. If you are her cousin, it is correct that you should appear like her cousin. You must choose the right things, and leave me to manage about the bills. Whatever Miss Bertram wishes ought to be done.'

Pauline was not old enough to be amused at this axiom, gravely uttered. She took it as a matter of course, and was glad he so felt for the sweet and kind Miss Bertram, of whom she scarcely dared even yet to think in the light of relationship. However, the choosing of new dresses was a pleasant matter, and Pauline threw herself into it eagerly.

Since he allowed her *carte blanche* as to expense, it was well that she had tact to fix upon nothing extravagant, and taste to choose what was ladylike and becoming. She did her part of the matter wisely and well. Maxwell insisted on one point only, and that was that the dresses should be ready-made. Happily two were found which would fit nicely with slight alteration. A neat little black bonnet trimmed with white daisies, a cloth jacket, a pair of kid gloves, and at another shop a pair of boots, completed the outfit.

But concerning all this Mrs. James Bertram said nothing. She showed no satisfaction. She gave Mr. Maxwell no thanks, and her child no sympathy. Mr. Maxwell did not look for thanks, though the three sovereigns lay still untouched in a hidden corner of his pocket-book. Pauline did look for sympathy, and her half-childish delight at finding herself once more neatly and prettily dressed received a check.

This singular sullenness or stupefaction of feeling on the part of Mrs. James Bertram did not lessen. Pauline could not understand it. There was intense suffering, and moaning often went on for hours together, but the old defiant self-satisfaction and talkativeness seemed both to have left her.

Was it that, having at length gained her long-sought object, she suddenly found that with it she had not gained peace? Was it that she realised herself to be a bankrupt soul, standing on the brink of the other life, to which she had given so little thought?

It might have been such an awakening. Those around could not tell. Whatever were her feelings, she kept them to herself. Mr. Bryce spoke of a grave change for the worse, and said she could not last long. It seemed at one time as if the two sisters-in-law—the fair high-bred Englishwoman, and the dark sallow semi-native of India—were pressing at one and the same time to the border of the great Beyond. How many have taken the plunge thence, not knowing whither they went!

Mr. Maxwell was in and out. Bodily wants supplied, he gave earnest heed to the poor woman's deeper needs. For her sake mainly he did not leave the hotel so soon as he had intended. He visited her two or three times a day, reading to her, praying with her, pressing her to find safety in the blood of a crucified Saviour. He found her very ignorant, but he tried to teach her the nature of sin, the need of atonement, and the depth of the love of Christ. She let him say what he liked, offering small response, but seemingly attentive.

He made the most of his time, and well it was he did so, for short time remained. Four days of intense suffering followed the change of lodgings, and then pain lessened and stupor set in. Doctor or friend could do nothing for her. She lay, wasted, sallow, a miserable object, with no light of hope or peace on the poor pain-worn features.

'If she would but speak once again! O, if there was but one little word of hope!' Pauline cried bitterly, when Mr. Maxwell told her that the doctor hardly expected a return of consciousness.

'There may be more sense than we know. It is not too late yet for God's mercy,' Mr. Maxwell said gently, and Pauline returned to watch hour after hour beside the bed, mingling her watching with prayer.

One little gleam of light was all she asked. And a faint ray of hope came to gladden her. It would not have seemed much to others, perhaps, but Pauline made much of it. She was alone in the room; and fancying she caught a glimmer of sense in the half-glazed eyes, she said softly:

'Mother, don't you know your Pauline?'

'Pauline!' and the helpless hand moved an inch towards her. 'I'm very bad, Pauline.'

'O mother, you are very ill. Mother, mother dear, won't you pray the Lord Jesus to save you? He died for you. Won't you, mother—mother *dearest?*'

Something of softening showed in the hard outlines of the face. There was a moment's pause, and then Mrs. James Bertram whispered:

'If He doesn't—nobody will.'

'Mother, He will if you ask Him—if you want to have done with sins, and if you pray Him to save you. He never cast anybody away that came to Him. Mr. Maxwell says so. O mother, do pray.'

But the tiny rift in the cloud had closed again, and the heavy stupor had crept back. Words were unheeded, and appeals met with no reply. Did those few words mean that, however feebly, however imperfectly, she had repented, had turned to Christ, and was truly, though not confidently, putting her trust in Him? Pauline believed this. Others hoped it might be so.

There was nothing else to build upon. Before morning *all* was over.

CHAPTER XLIV.

PAULINE.

'AND what are we to do with that poor child?' said Muriel.

She stood in the dining-room, looking with perplexed eyes at Montgomery Maxwell. Beside her was a young man, Arthur Bertram, square in make both of head and frame, with good-humoured resolution and common-sense about his solid chin and closed lips. He had only arrived that day, being called home by increasingly bad accounts of his mother.

'Bring her here,' suggested Arthur.

'What would poor mamma think?'

Maxwell passed his hand thoughtfully over his lips. 'That is it—that is it,' he said. 'Otherwise, no plan more natural. She is too much of a child to stay alone in those lodgings—and too much of a woman—I mean, if she were more of a child I could have her to stay with the boys and me.'

'This is her rightful home for the present,' said Arthur.

'I had thoughts of a school,' said Maxwell.

'Just orphaned, and sent off straight to school. Poor child, that sounds hard,' Muriel observed pityingly. 'Besides, no school is fixed upon. She must go somewhere to-day.'

'She can go to school by-and-by. We shall have to educate her into a governess, I suppose. Meantime, where can she be, if not here?'

'But—mamma?' repeated Muriel, looking at her brother, who had *spoken last.*

'We must act for my mother as we believe she would wish us to act, looking upon matters in their present state. Remember, she would not wish to excite further talk. All Bushby knows about Pauline. To make a secret of the matter is not possible. To take her into our house for a few days or weeks, and then send her to school for the finishing of her education, would make an ordinary affair of the whole, and stop gossip. I have very little doubt my mother would agree with me.'

It was a clear and sensible view of the question. 'You have not seen Pauline yet,' said Muriel, wearing a troubled expression.

'No. I don't see that that makes any difference. It is not a question of personal liking, but of right and wrong. She must find shelter somewhere.'

Muriel felt with him, though she would have hesitated so to act alone. He was very willing to endure the responsibility, and she knew that Arthur could do things which she might not venture upon. Little more passed then, for she was summoned back to the sick-room, but an hour or two later, Arthur came to the door and beckoned her outside. A day-nurse, as well as a night-nurse, was now in constant attendance. Two watchers in the room were a necessity, and Muriel could rarely be absent. Her voice and touch alone possessed soothing power over the patient.

'Mother asleep?' he whispered.

'O no, I wish she were. It is only exhaustion which keeps her still, and she mutters almost all the while. Listen.'

'Poor mother! I wish we could see a turn. Muriel, she is here.'

'Who?'

'Pauline.'

'Already?'

'I found the poor little thing in such distress that I could *not leave* her there longer. What a pretty creature it is—

so like you too. Go down for a minute. I'll wait here, and call you if you are wanted.'

'Arthur, I hope we are right in having her,' said Muriel anxiously.

'There is nothing else to be done. Now the matter is known, my mother will wish us to act as people would expect her to act.'

There was so much literal truth in this, that Muriel could hardly resist a smile. She went into the drawing-room, and found Pauline there, so transformed as to the outer person by Mr. Maxwell's liberality, that for a moment Muriel positively hesitated.

'How do you do, Pauline?' she said kindly.

Pauline looked white, and her lips moved voicelessly. She mistook the cause of the slight hesitation, and felt herself painfully unwelcome.

'It has been a sad time for you, has it not, poor child? We will try to make you happy.'

'Miss Bertram—if you please——'

Words refused to come, and Pauline shook with smothered emotion. Muriel kissed her quietly.

'We are cousins, you know,' she said. 'I am Muriel to you, not Miss Bertram any longer.'

'O no, I could not say that, and please, Miss Bertram, I could earn my own living, I am sure I could. I would much rather. I would rather be a dressmaker or milliner or anything—than——'

'Than what?'

Pauline broke down and cried bitterly, wringing her hands. 'What is it? What troubles you so much, Pauline?'

'I would rather get my own living, please,' said Pauline, straightening herself with an effort. 'I know I could,—and I need not be in anybody's way.'

'You will not be that. You must bear a short uncertainty,' *said Muriel.* 'It is my wish and my brother's that

you should stay here for a time. I believe it would be my mother's wish also. I think she will feel as we do about it —if——'

Muriel could not finish. 'And she isn't any better yet, and it is all poor mother's doing. O, I know you must hate the very sight of me,' said Pauline mournfully. 'I would rather go away, please.'

'No; it was not your doing. You had nothing to do with it. And my dear mother is in God's hands. Her illness will go on as He wills. I try not to look farther. You must think of this as your home for the next few days. I have not leisure even to talk over arrangements for you at present.'

Pauline was subdued. She ceased crying, and said timidly, 'Couldn't I be of any use then, please, Miss Ber——'

'No,—Muriel.'

'I don't feel as if I could say that.'

'You must learn. Yes, I will find things for you to do.'

Muriel stood silently looking down at the sorrowful little face, which seemed to be taking a set of resolute endurance.

'I'll try not to be in the way,' said Pauline earnestly.

'No fear of that. Don't mistake us, Pauline. My brother and I are most glad to have you here. I cannot answer for my mother while she is like this, but we will arrange something for you between us. How would you like to go to a finishing-school by-and-by, and be educated as a governess?'

'I'll do anything you like,' said Pauline meekly, and then, with a sudden change of expression, she murmured, 'O, it does feel so strange—no home—nobody in all the world to love me!'

Muriel took her two hands with a kind pressure. 'Poor child, but you will not feel that long. We are not quite strangers even now. I think I began to love you the first time I saw you.'

'Did you?' The rosy glow in the girl's face was worth seeing. 'O no, you can't, because we have been such a trouble. I love you—more than I can tell you. I think it would be happiness to be with you always. I would like to do anything for you. But you—O no, you don't mean that.'

There was nothing for it but to take the slender figure within her arms for a brief but sisterly embrace. The dignified Miss Bertram was not often so demonstrative. She was rather surprised at herself, and stepped back a pace composedly the next instant.

'Now, Pauline, you will understand me better. I must go back to my mother, but Price shall show you the room where you will sleep, and presently Arthur will give you a book to amuse you. By-the-bye—' and she stopped—'we must not put off one thing; you will need mourning.'

'Mr. Maxwell took me to the shop this morning quite early,' said Pauline in a low voice. 'He said he wanted to get it done, so as not to trouble you. He is very very kind. The people in the shop are going to change the other dress he bought me for a black one, and he made me choose everything I could want. I can't think why he is so good to me—and you too. O poor mother!' Pauline concluded, breaking down suddenly, as the thought of the mourning brought vividly back her recent loss. But the tears were speedily stopped, with a reiterated 'Please don't mind me; I'm going to be good,' and through the rest of the day she was quietly occupied and studiously composed.

A week went by, and still no change for the better showed in Mrs. Bertram. There were now few lucid moments. She recognised almost no one. Her mutterings were as ever of 'that woman—that dreadful woman,'—but she had little strength left for speech. Muriel rarely left the room. She was wearing herself out in ceaseless attendance there, and Arthur's help came opportunely, though he could not take her *place*. *A day* seldom passed, in the course of which

Mr. Maxwell did not find his way to Bushby, albeit he commonly slept at his own home. Dr. Peters came regularly about three times in the twenty-four hours, and occasionally remained through the night.

How slight seemed matters of earthly rank and earthly position at such a time! Under the dark shadow which lay upon the house, questions as to what the world might or might not think became of small importance. Muriel felt them so.

Not that either then or at other times she held any extravagant theories as to rank being wrong, riches sinful, position despicable. God has not made all men equal. Rather, He has made men such that equality is an absolute impossibility. To one He gives riches, to another powers of mind, to another a superior position in society, to another the influence of beauty, to another some or all of these together. To undervalue any one of God's gifts is as complete a mistake as to over-value any one of them. It may be a question whether they can be overvalued; wrongly valued they may undoubtedly be. But I think the gist of the matter lies here: whether they are accepted and held simply as gifts of God, put into man's charge for a while to be used in His service, or whether they are grasped and proudly possessed, as altogether apart from God and identical with self, to be used in the glorification of self.

It was a real trial, no doubt, to Mrs. Bertram to find herself with near relatives of such a social standing as Mrs. James Bertram. Had she looked upon her own social standing as simply that position in life where God had placed her, she could have accepted also from His hand the trial sent alongside. But haughtily regarding her position in society as part of her very self, and her standing before men as essential to her happiness, then when it was touched she was touched, and if it fell she fell. She could not stand in a sheath of womanly and Christian dignity, unassailable from any such point of attack.

But her weaknesses, her self-absorption, her worldly spirit, were remembered now, if remembered at all, only sorrowfully and compassionately by all who knew her. Through Bushby and Claverton the passing interest of a little gossip about the Bertrams' relatives was swallowed up in the far deeper interest inspired by poor Mrs. Bertram's condition. Few knew exactly how the illness had come on, though the storm and the falling tree were commonly supposed to be concerned. Wide sympathy was, however, expressed, and inquiries at the door were so frequent that a bulletin had daily to be written and fastened to the knocker.

Muriel showed at length signs of failing, for the long illness tried the strength of all the nurses, and Muriel rarely had an undisturbed night. Even in delirium Mrs. Bertram called for her incessantly, and though she did not often seem to recognise her daughter, Muriel's voice had a soothing power over her, possessed by none other.

They were put to straits one day, soon after Pauline had taken up her abode in the house. Muriel was taken with faintness, and could not remain with Mrs. Bertram. She was indignant with herself, but nevertheless had to lie down in the drawing-room. One servant who had been up all night was sleeping, another was out, Arthur was absent, and Mrs. Bertram was so ill that the nurse needed help. Pauline went by Muriel's wish to listen at the open door of the sick-room, and see if the nurse could manage. While there, the latter suddenly beckoned her in to give some slight assistance. She obeyed instinctively, and ten minutes later hurried down to her cousin with brilliant cheeks.

'O, Miss Bertram—only think—I have been in the room. Nurse called me in. And *she* took me for you—she did really. She was crying out for you, and when I came near she called me "Muriel," and made me hold her hand, and seemed pleased. Nurse told me to talk, because my voice quieted her. And she kept talking and talking of something that *had happened*. O, *did* she mean poor mother?

'She is delirious. You must not mind,' Muriel answered. But from that day Pauline was found to be an essential help in Mrs. Bertram's room. She was quick and ready, soft in her movements, and accustomed to illness. So long as Mrs. Bertram knew no one, Dr. Peters decided that her presence could do no possible harm, and the consequent relief in the strain upon Muriel was not small. Whether she or Pauline were present, the effect upon Mrs. Bertram was the same. She did not know them apart, even in the dim sense in which she knew Muriel apart from other people.

'You certainly are very like Muriel,' Arthur remarked one day, and Pauline's delighted look made him add, 'Then you don't mind being told so?'

'I would rather be like dear Miss Bertram than anybody in the world.'

'When are you going to call us "Muriel" and "Arthur"?'

'I don't know. It is so difficult,' she said, blushing.

'I wish you would get into the habit. People know you are our cousin, and if you do not behave as our cousin it will cause remarks. My mother, too, is your "aunt Mary." If you speak of her to friends, you must say, "my aunt," not "Mrs. Bertram."'

'If you really wish it, I will,' said Pauline timidly; and at whatever cost to herself she no longer continued her old fashion of address. 'Arthur' and 'Muriel' were pronounced at first with downcast eyes and manifest effort, but in a few days they came easily. She was far more in her natural element here than she had been in her poor London lodgings. 'A sweet lady-like girl' was the common verdict of those who came across her. Her dissimilarity to her mother was something remarkable, not only as to face, but as to manners and tastes. There was nothing in her ways to grate upon the most refined senses, save at first a few slight schoolgirlish tricks arising from ignorance, any one of which was dropped immediately on the smallest hint from Muriel.

Good accounts of John Rivers were received about this

time. He was greatly enjoying the mild south of France, his cough being less, and his strength increased.

'We pray much and think much of you all these trying weeks,' he wrote, for it had been needful to send him word of Mrs. Bertram's illness and its cause. 'I little thought we were leaving you to such a sad time. God grant it may end brightly.

'So you have found a new little cousin! Little I should hardly call her, since you say she is almost as tall as yourself, but fifteen sounds young. Connie is a child still. She is very curious about Pauline, and says the way it has come about is "just like a book." I do not know what to say to that. I see stranger matters around me in everyday life, than ever I saw in story-books.

'Existence is wonderful altogether. I often lie near our window, looking out on the blue Mediterranean, and think how life moves on and ever onward, with all its restless heavings and tossings and changes. Sometimes I dream over the past, noting stage after stage of my own journey, and seeing how at each stage I have clung to the one I was leaving, not knowing the loving things from God's hand which lay scattered ahead. I would not do so any more. Better to go straight on, smiling, no matter where He leads, even though some partings and heart-wrenches must be undergone by the way.

'A friend in the hotel, a medical man, strongly recommends the Nile for me. But I incline to try Cannes through this winter, and perhaps the Nile next—if I live. It seems almost foolish to look forward so far, however. What may not happen meantime?

'Do you not often wonder at yourself, Murie—I am sure I do at myself—for being ever troubled and tossed? Did you ever find that while you were anxious about some perplexing tangle of difficulties, you have prayed in faith for this and that, to help you out of your tangle, and God has *given you this and that* just as you asked Him, and still the

tangle has been there? Then at last, in despair of doing anything or even knowing what to ask, you have flung off all responsibility on your Master, praying like Hezekiah: "Undertake for me; arrange for me; do for me just in the way that Thou seest to be best; act for me as a father for a child; I leave it all to Thee." And then the difficulties have vanished, and the tangle has become smooth, and everything is arranged as you would have wished,—only far better?

'I do not know whether it is the experience of all Christians, or even of most Christians. Perhaps not. It may not have been yours. God has to deal so differently with His different children—to deny things to one which He need not deny to another. He does not set us down in huge classes, and think of us and treat us "in the mass." The very word "mass" describes an intensely human idea, springing from our limited vision. I am quite sure God never thinks of men in such a light. His dealings with us are thoroughly individual dealings, showing close consideration of each disposition and each trait of character. And how perfectly He knows us—He who created us!

'So this experience which has been mine may not have been yours. Perhaps, because God does not so show Himself to you; *perhaps*, because you have not so thrown off your cares and tangles upon Him. See which it is, Murie. If you do your part, I am very sure He will give you some manner of revelation of Himself, of His boundless power, His great kindness, His exceeding tenderness.

'You see I can write better than when I went away, with less of fatigue and pain. So that is a mercy, and better nights are another mercy. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

'I have qualms at writing so much about self, but you would, I know, be satisfied with nothing less. I do hope we may hear quickly a brighter account. Don't overdo yourself, Muriel. Have plenty of help. You can bear and do much, but there is a point beyond which the most willing horse

breaks down. How anxiously we shall watch every post for further news. I am inclined to envy Maxwell his vicinity. Dear love from Rose and Connie, in which I join.

'Believe me your affectionate brother,

'JOHN RIVERS.'

The fever at length diminished, and then came a long almost hopeless struggle between life and death, for there seemed no power to rally. Day after day Mrs. Bertram lay on the borders of the grave, just living and no more. Nothing but a good constitution and devoted care saved her—so the doctors said. Nothing but the loving mercy of God—so Muriel and Arthur said. For she did recover, though days grew into weeks before the worst of the danger was over.

Pauline still went in and out. It made no difference. Mrs. Bertram was in a state of such complete prostration as to take notice of nothing. Even when strength began slowly to return, memory seemed to be blotted out, and she continued quietly to accept Pauline for Muriel. They were careful not to be in her room together, but even that would scarcely have roused her. For a time the doctors feared she might never entirely regain her senses.

This fear passed off, and there came a day when the need for caution became manifest. Mrs. Bertram was seen to fix her eyes on Pauline with a puzzled expression, as the latter fed her with a few spoonfuls of jelly, and then there was a murmur: 'You have grown so pretty, my dear, so very pretty. I like the way you do your hair. It makes you look so young.'

Pauline was allowed no more in the room thenceforward. She felt it a real deprivation, having delighted much in finding herself of use, but she submitted without a murmur. The last few years had given a severe training in self-denial, and deeper heart-lessons learned within the last few weeks were already bearing fruit.

CHAPTER XLV.

MORE CHANGES.

'THIS has been a long illness of mine. I feel sometimes as if I were coming back from a journey.'

Mrs. Bertram lay on a couch in the room adjoining her bedroom, looking out of the window. Winter had almost passed away, and spring was advancing, as the birds outside bore evidence with their merry chirpings and bursts of song. The trees were breaking into green, and the clear blue sky overhead made a pleasant change after weeks of dull weather.

Mrs. Bertram was creeping back very slowly to health. She had not yet been downstairs or seen any friends, and a certain misty confusion about the past seemed to have hung over her up to this date. She had asked no questions, and made no allusions to the immediate cause of her illness, but seemed quite content to drift on week after week, leaving the outer world to take heed to itself. A stranger would have found it difficult to recognise the dignified Mrs. Bertram in this gentle passive invalid, appearing scarcely to have a wish of her own. Muriel puzzled herself over the transformation sometimes. Arthur said, 'It will not last. Half of it is weakness.'

Pauline still lived in the house. Somehow the notion of school had dropped into the background. She was a great favourite in Bushby, being universally accepted and treated as Mrs. Bertram's niece, and not a little admired on her own account. Nobody in Elm Villa would have been willing to

part with the bright-spirited unselfish winsome creature, and the tie between her and Muriel had become so strong that Arthur sometimes laughingly called them 'mother and daughter.' He liked her much himself, in cousinly fashion, and encouraged her to study, chose her books to read, set her tasks to prepare, and criticised and corrected her doings with blunt good-humour. Pauline was perfectly willing to be corrected and criticised. She had never been so happy in her life before, and only dreaded the day which might bring her dismissal from Mrs. Bertram's hand.

Montgomery Maxwell had been in and out not seldom this winter. He came as a friend, no mention of aught else being made. Pauline's grateful liking for him was artlessly expressed as ranking him 'almost best in all the world, except dear dear Muriel.' Mrs. Bertram was not unaware of these visits, but she took the matter indifferently, and never saw him or asked to see him. The only outsider admitted, except the doctor, was Mr. Fielding. He paid a brief visit occasionally, and was listened to with a passive politeness which might or might not have implied pleasure and agreement.

'This has been a long illness of mine,' she said unexpectedly, as she lay looking out of the window. 'I feel sometimes as if I were coming back from a journey, Muriel.'

'Dr. Peters would like you to get away from home soon. How do you like the thought?'

'It is all a trouble. I don't seem as if I much cared ever to be up and about again.'

'That is weakness. Love of motion will come with the power of locomotion,' said Muriel playfully.

'Perhaps. I wonder if I shall ever be the same as I used to be.'

'In health? I don't see why not, in time.'

'Not health. I don't feel satisfied looking back.'

'Better not to be—sometimes,' said Muriel softly.

'Did it *ever seem* to you that there was a sort of empti-

ness in my life?' asked Mrs. Bertram. 'I don't know how else to describe it.'

'Forgive me, mamma, but it was empty. There was the want of God in your life.'

Muriel's voice trembled, and two bright tears fell glittering from Mrs. Bertram's eyes.

'Yes, I believe that is it. And yet I really thought myself quite religious enough. I wonder how it was. But it isn't too late yet to change?'

'O no, indeed.'

'I think I am beginning. Some things Mr. Fielding has said have helped me a little. I suppose it isn't rash to believe that God will really forgive, for Christ's sake—if I pray.'

'I don't see any rashness in believing that the King of Heaven will keep His pledged word. The rashness would lie rather in the direction of daring to doubt Him.'

'He does not give pardon to all——'

'To all that ask. He doesn't promise to those who don't ask.'

'No—true——' said Mrs. Bertram languidly.

This was the first time any conversation of the kind had passed between them, but not the last. It seemed to Muriel that her mother was stepping quietly through the portals of the kingdom of Heaven. Hers was not a death-bed repentance, for had she passed away in her time of danger she would have died unrepentant and unconscious of her peril. It had been needful that she should be brought very low, before earthly pride would let her bend her head to go in, but now she was entering in child-like and simple style. Her very weakness of body made it in a sense more easy for her to yield herself. The time for prostrate pride and worldliness to reassert their power in deadly fight with their former slave was not yet come. It would come soon enough.

No allusion was made to Mrs. James Bertram. Muriel

wondered often whether that story were all blotted out of her mother's recollection. If so, it would have to be soon recalled. But one day her difficulty was solved. Mrs. Bertram had been lying with shut eyes and knitted brows, after taking a tottering turn up and down the room. Muriel, thinking her over-fatigued, kept silence, till her mother said suddenly,—

'I want a few words with you.'

Muriel was all attention immediately.

'Are you reading a letter—anything of importance?'

'O no,' Muriel answered. 'Only from poor Sophy Rokeby, who used to live at Claverton. She seems to have been very suffering lately, but she always writes brightly; so full of sympathy too, about you. They have been for some months at Hastings—she and her mother. What did you want to say?'

'One or two things. About—about that poor woman, partly. I can't remember very clearly what happened those few days, but I am sorry I did not give her some help. I suppose she left Bushby.'

Muriel hesitated.

'I mean Mrs. James Bertram, my sister-in-law,' said Mrs. Bertram, flushing nervously. 'I am afraid—I am afraid it was true—and if things were as she said——'

'She had every comfort. We saw about that.'

'Had——' repeated Mrs. Bertram.

'She was almost dying then, and she only lived a few days.'

Mrs. Bertram drew one or two long shivering breaths.

'It is not good for you to think much of that time,' said Muriel gently.

'No, I can't—I must not. It brings such a confused feeling. Poor thing. I wish I had been kind to her,' murmured Mrs. Bertram. 'Then there was—am I forgetting?—was there not a child?'

'Yes. You will not mind seeing her some day. She is *called Pauline.*'

Mrs. Bertram shrank visibly.

'Is that needful? We must provide for her of course. I am quite willing. But—the child of such a mother——'

'You will not think them alike. But never mind that just now.'

'I suppose something of it all has become known in Bushby,' said Mrs. Bertram, changing colour again.

'Pauline is a great favourite in Bushby, mamma. Lady Parkes calls her charming, and Mary Parkes has struck up quite a friendship with her.'

'Indeed. How very singular! Then she is in Bushby still. But I must try not to feel too much about that sort of thing. Muriel, I want to say something else to you.'

'Yes, mamma.'

'I have been thinking; I don't like to see you look so thin. You are losing your handsome appearance too fast, much too fast for your age. It is having things weigh upon your mind. I cannot understand your being so now, for when I was ill, just getting over the worst time, you struck me sometimes as looking so particularly well and pretty, so very young too. You look twenty years older now than you did then. You do indeed.'

'Shall I see if I can manage to present before you the same appearance, mamma?' asked Muriel brightly, though with an inward tremor as she came to a sudden resolution.

'What do you mean? Another dress? And perhaps if you were to do your hair differently——'

'Wait one half-minute, mamma. My preparations won't take long. I shall be back directly.'

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face, mantling with warm blushes, while the soft black eyes threatened to overflow with gathering tears. Poor little Pauline. The dreaded moment of possible banishment had come at last, and she fully expected words of haughty dismissal to follow.

'Who is that, Muriel? I am hardly equal to visitors,' faltered Mrs. Bertram.

'Pauline is not a visitor, mamma. We have had her in the house for months, and she helped to nurse you through your illness.'

'To nurse me!'

'Yes, indeed. You cannot think how useful she was, or how affectionate you were to her.'

'I—don't remember,' said Mrs. Bertram, trembling.

'She is my adopted child. May she not be yours too? Look, mamma, do you think we are alike?'

'Very much,' said Mrs. Bertram, gazing at the two as if fascinated, 'wonderfully alike. I am very tired, Muriel.'

'May Pauline come again to see you some time?'

The girl drew a step nearer, her whole heart in her eyes.

'Yes, certainly,' said Mrs. Bertram. 'What is the name, did you say?'

Pauline answered for herself. 'And may I—may I call you "Aunt Mary?"' she asked eagerly.

'Yes, my dear,' said Mrs. Bertram.

To Muriel's surprise she signed Pauline to go nearer, took [illegible] hand, and looked attentively from one cousin to the

[illegible]—yes, extremely alike. Muriel's eyes and hair, [illegible] complexion is a little darker. You are a very [illegible] Pauline. I hope you are not vain of it.'

[illegible] is teaching me,' said Pauline humbly.

[illegible]at is right. You must try to be like Muriel. [illegible] proud of your prettiness, my dear. I am sure [illegible]ng to be always thinking about one's looks.'

[illegible]u. And I may love you?' said Pauline shyly.

'Yes, certainly. Good-bye now, and come another time.'

Mrs. Bertram actually touched her lips to the brown blushing cheek. Pauline glided away in speechless delight, and Muriel said, 'Thank you, mamma.'

'She is remarkable-looking,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'Everyone admires her.'

'If only she were a little more English in her colouring.'

'Ah, you never succeeded in painting me white. I am afraid we shall not manage it with Pauline either.'

'I am glad Lady Parkes likes her, at all events,' murmured Mrs. Bertram.

'And you don't mind our having taken her into the house? Arthur thought it best. He believed you would wish it—the facts being known in Bushby.'

'Arthur was quite right,' said Mrs. Bertram, with her curious new submission, and she fell asleep, having removed a weight of anxiety from her daughter and niece. Pauline could scarcely contain her joy, and went laughing about the house, singing under her breath like a little bird. 'O, it is such happiness,' she said, throwing her arms around Muriel in her impulsive fashion, when next they met. 'O Muriel, it does seem almost too good to be true. I thought aunt Mary would be so vexed, so cold,—and she didn't seem to mind at all. Isn't it happiness? I do think God is so good and kind to me. I wish I could thank Him rightly.'

Mrs. Bertram forgot that she had not said all she intended to say to Muriel. If Muriel noted the fact she did not think much about it. Later in the day, however, Mrs. Bertram remarked suddenly:

'Mr. Maxwell comes sometimes to the house, does he not?'

'Yes,—he does, mamma.'

Then there was a pause.

'Price tells me Mr. Wentworth and his sister have gone *abroad* for some months.'

Muriel's 'yes' was sober. She could not think of the Wentworths without pain.

'I can imagine the reason,' said Mrs. Bertram in a low voice. 'No doubt—this becoming known——'

'O no, it is not that. Indeed you are mistaken,' said Muriel hurriedly, 'I do not think many knew the "half-caste" part of the matter, and I am quite sure Mr. Wentworth would not trouble himself about it. It is not that. I thought it right to let Miss Wentworth know the state of things. You will not be quite pleased, I am afraid, but I told her about Mr. Maxwell. The other idea never could have come to anything, and I saw a need to stop it at once. Forgive me, please, for I could not do anything else.'

'I have been trying to give it up,' said Mrs. Bertram, with a slight choke in her voice. 'Yes,—I see all is the same still,—I mean between you and Mr. Maxwell.'

'Nothing can ever change it.'

'And that is what makes you so thin and worn.'

'Mamma—I have tried to be patient——'

Muriel's face went down on the sofa-cushions, and Mrs. Bertram touched her hand.

'My dear, don't. I can't stand agitation. I am going to give way, Muriel; I am indeed. Mr. Maxwell is a good man, and I want you to be happy. Only you must not leave me just for a little while.'

'Mamma—O mamma——'

Muriel kissed her mother passionately, intensely, and Mrs. Bertram held her fast, crying a little.

'I shall not mind in a short time. I shall get used to it. I did want to have you at the Manor. But I see it can't be. And you have been very unhappy, have you not?'

'Not unhappy,' whispered Muriel. 'Not really unhappy,—only it has seemed very long to wait sometimes.'

'But you will not go just yet,' repeated Mrs. Bertram.

'O no, indeed. He could not ask it—could not wish it.'

So quietly difficulties cleared away, and Muriel Bertram and Montgomery Maxwell were engaged.

The wedding was put off until the autumn. Muriel was anxious to see her mother fully restored to health first, and recovery continued to be a slow matter. Also she had a dream of leaving Pauline to fill her own place, and time was needed to make this possible. No one suggested the idea to Mrs. Bertram, but three months had not passed before she remarked to Maxwell, 'Pauline is a sweet girl. I really don't know how I could get on by-and-by without Muriel, if I had not Pauline. She is so attentive and careful, that I am sure I shall find her a comfort.' The plan was thenceforward openly acknowledged among them, and Pauline fell into the position of younger daughter with aptitude.

As Mrs. Bertram's extreme feebleness passed off, it was curious to note how, with return of life and strength, there came a corresponding revival of old tendencies, old faults, old love of the world, old vain and self-sufficient inclinations. She found that the habits of mind which had obtained sway through fifty years were not to be slain simply by a six months' illness. There was need for much prayer and much resistance, and victory alternated with failure; yet on the whole those around could see a marked change and a steadfast advance. Mrs. Bertram was not what she once had been.

Early in the summer, when all fear of spring winds was over, John and Rose and Connie came home. John was wonderfully better. He seemed to have taken 'a new lease of life,' it was said.

'We don't live by the lease,' remarked John, while spending half an hour in Mrs. Bertram's drawing-room, on the day of his arrival. 'From minute to minute is all we can count upon. The more we can live in that spirit the *better*.'

'But you are really stronger,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'I hardly feel myself the same individual that left Bushby last autumn. The doctors tell me I must be content to spend my next half-dozen winters abroad. The delicacy may decrease in time. I little thought I should ever be back among you all,' he added half to himself.

'John, do you know uncle Chesney is coming home with his little Sibbie?' said Muriel.

'Latest item of news? It had not reached me. Anything else?'

'Sibbie is too old to stay in India any longer, so uncle Chesney is going to retire. He can't make up his mind to be parted from her.'

'Chesney has not been the same man since Sibyl's death,' said John gravely. 'The child ought to have returned before.'

'Nine years old—I wonder she has lived. But he has had her constantly on the hills. That is not all, John. I wrote to uncle Chesney a few weeks ago, saying that Mr. Wentworth wishes to let the Manor for an indefinite period. He finds the Swiss mountains suit his sister so well, that he has determined to settle there for a few years. And uncle Chesney writes back: 'Secure the Manor for me, and tell your mother I shall expect her and the new niece to come and help me fill it.'

'He always calls me "the new niece,"' said Pauline; and then she slipped out of the room, with a feeling that Muriel and her mother might wish to have John to themselves.

'Chesney will be home in time for the wedding,' said Mrs. Bertram.

'That will be an event,' remarked John, smiling at Muriel. 'Well,—nobody appreciates Maxwell better than I do.'

'No,—so I always liked to feel,' said Muriel.

John played with a penholder lying near him.

'Changes—changes,' he said in half-dreamy fashion. 'How they come one after another. Just as we think we *are settled comfortably* down in our particular work, for any

number of months and years, there comes a general *bouleversement*,—everything turned upside down. It is needful.'

'I suppose every change has its lesson,' said Muriel.

'No doubt about that:

> '"There's nought on earth to rest upon,
> All things are changing here.'

But though we say that, we don't realise it. "Our Jesus changeth not,"—yet we don't grasp the fact that "He alone is changeless," till we see all that we most cling to shaking and trembling around, and only the Rock of Ages stationary. That helps us to understand, and to anchor ourselves to Him solely. What a kaleidoscope life is! And every new pattern that comes we think surely must remain.'

'It is a pleasant pattern now, John,' said Muriel.

'Yes, but it won't last indefinitely—don't expect it. Others as fair may form afterwards. We can't stand still, you see, while the tide of time is hurrying on, and every tide will and must bring variations with it. What matter, if Christ is ours?' John said the last words suddenly, looking at Mrs. Bertram.

'But a great many things do matter, John,' said Mrs. Bertram, who was not given to climbing heights.

'Essentially—yes. Comparatively—no. Everything has its own value. But compare the value of the less with the greater, and it becomes as nothing beside the greater.'

'I am not sure that I quite understand what you mean,' said Mrs. Bertram, after a perplexed pause. 'I hope, John, you will not persuade Muriel to do anything extraordinary at her wedding. I cannot suppose that being religious makes it needful for us to dress unlike everybody else.'

'Muriel is not given to eccentricities,' said John, unable to help smiling.

'No; but I did not understand. I thought you were saying that nothing mattered except religion.'

'*I* would have nothing apart from religion. Christ in everything, and everything in the name of Christ.'

'But—a wedding, John.'

'There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee where He was present,' said John, softly. 'The test as to the way things are managed, is whether we should shrink from asking Him to be present, if He walked this earth now.'

Muriel's downcast eyes shone with strong feeling. Mrs. Bertram looked thoughtful. She would hear utterances without even a word of dissent, which once she would have strongly opposed.

'That would stop one from having—some things,' she said at length.

'Don't have those things, aunt Mary.'

Then a pause.

'John, I noticed a verse in my Bible this morning,' said Mrs. Bertram unexpectedly.

'Which?' he said.

'It made rather an impression on me—the marginal reading especially. It is in the twelfth of Romans: "Mind not high things, but——" I forget exactly how it ends.'

'"Mind not high things, but be contented with mean things."'

'Yes, that is it. I am afraid I don't like "mean things" best.'

'You are not required to like them best. Contentment does not mean preference.'

'But we are not to "mind high things."'

'No; not to care greatly for them, not to love them, not to set our heart upon them. And if God gives us "mean things" we are to be content with those "mean things," and not to be vexing and worrying ourselves about the "high things" which He has not given us. That is the meaning I gather.'

'And I suppose, as we learn to cling more to Christ, we learn to cling less to this world,' said Muriel.

'Necessarily,—as the one clasp tightens, the other loosens, John answered.

A few weeks later, Chesney Rivers, having retired from the army, arrived in England with his pale-faced little daughter. He had filled good appointments, and laid by considerably of late years, so that he came back a wealthy man, able to rent the Manor on the very reasonable terms demanded by Ernest Wentworth. A lease of seven years was taken, and Mrs. Bertram gave up her little Bushby house to live with her brother. Arthur remained in Bushby as John's second curate, but Pauline became an inmate of the Manor, and was speedily as great a favourite with Chesney Rivers as with every one else. Muriel also spent a few weeks in her old home, before quitting it to enter upon a new phase of life, as the wife of Montgomery Maxwell. John's two youngest boys were to live still with her and Mr. Maxwell, going to a day-school near at hand, and returning home only in the holidays. Neither Muriel nor Mr. Maxwell was willing to give them up.

'It is a happy thing to wait upon God for what we want, until He sees fit to give us our desire,' Maxwell said placidly upon his wedding-day. 'And happier still to feel that His will is always best.'

Perhaps it was easy for Montgomery to say this at a time when the wish of his heart was granted him. But he had said and maintained the same at a time when the wish of his heart was denied him. Ay, and there was another, living among the snowy peaks of Switzerland, who might not have the thing he had longed for, yet who would have emphatically endorsed the words.

THE END.

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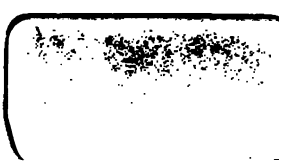
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